

PS2 / GameCube / Xbox / PC / GBA / Arcade / Retro

REVIEWED

- **FINAL FANTASY X-2** [PS2]
- **MARIO & LUIGI: SUPERSTAR SAGA** [GBA]
- **SNK VS. CAPCOM CHAOS** [ARC]
- **CASTLEVANIA** [PS2]
- **COUNTER-STRIKE** [XB]
- **MARIO PARTY 5** [GC]
- **SWORD OF MANA** [GBA]
- **SEGA GT ONLINE** [XB]
- **MANHUNT** [PS2]

FEATURE
TIME FLIES
Was 2003 a vintage year for gamers?

FEATURE
XBOX LIVE
You've come a long way, baby

IN DEPTH
HITMAN CONTRACTS
Agent 47 is back and business is better than ever…

180 PAGES OF GAMING ARTILLERY


eMag

You could say that 2003 was something of a transitional year for the three console manufacturers, but it would seem that the jockeying for places in the console wars is nearly over.

Despite updating some of its major franchises, Nintendo continues to lag behind – gone are the days when an appearance by Mario, Link or Samus was all that was required to ensure console success. Meanwhile, Sony has surged into the middle ground, with the hugely successful EyeToy showing that the company sees interactive entertainment in the home as the future of gaming. This has left the Xbox as the new platform for the hardcore gamer.

Although the PS2 will dominate this generation's console market, Microsoft has begun, apparently almost effortlessly, to come to the fore. Gone is the perception that the Xbox is an also-ran, this has been replaced by a belief that the console is a genuine tour de force in gaming with its wide range of games, the sheer power of the machine and, of course, Xbox Live.

Whatever your views, whatever your console preferences, you can be sure that 2004 will be every bit as hard-fought as 2003, which, for us gamers, can only be a good thing.

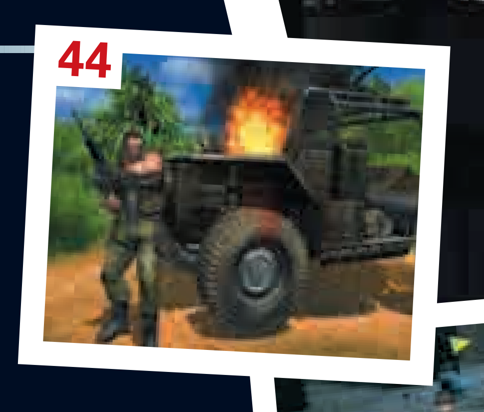
Simon Phillips, Group Editor




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HEADHUNTER: REDEMPTION 68

Jack Wade returns, and he's brought a new friend for some futuristic stealth action…

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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

CLIMAX REVEALS ITS UPDATED MULTIFORMAT GRAPHICS ENGINE

COR, BLIMEY

After cutting its teeth on the likes of *Moto GP: Ultimate Racing Technology*, *The Italian Job: LA Heist* and *ATV 2: Quad Power Racing*, Climax is finally getting ready to unveil the follow-up to its multiformat graphics engine, Blimey.

Climax's original Blimey engine was acclaimed for its power, user friendliness and its overall versatility, with skilled developers being able to turn around games for the Xbox, PS2, GameCube and PC in record time. Now, however, Climax's CEO, Karl Jeffrey, has revealed that a successor to the popular engine is needed if Climax is to stay ahead of its competitors. Step forward Blimey 2.

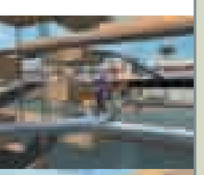
"The Blimey engine has served us well over the last couple of years, but Blimey 2 takes us to another level," Jeffrey said. "It's more powerful, more adaptable and, most importantly, it keeps us ahead of the competition. We've already got games in development that are using Blimey 2, and we're now ready for PS3, Xbox 2, PSP and any other next-generation platforms."

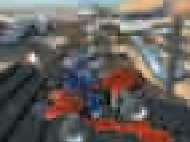
This is a bold claim, but the specifications certainly sound very impressive, with Blimey 2 able to manage advanced character animation, a developed AI framework and library for future racing titles, and a suitably improved toolset that enables much greater control over fine-tuning a game's visuals and gameplay content.

Ultimately, Blimey 2 should enable Climax to make the best possible games without worrying too much about potential hardware constraints. Other features include cross-platform online support, as well as support for the likes of Xbox Live, GameSpy and SCE-RT as well as the ability to show off all manner of full-screen effects and some highly optimised graphics rendering.

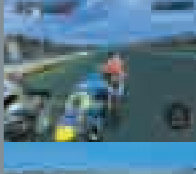
Disappointingly, Climax is unwilling to reveal which games it is currently working on, although we'd be very surprised if *Moto GP 3: Ultimate Racing Technology* isn't already lined up for Xbox 2. However, we do know that the developer will be using the engine outside the popular racing genre.

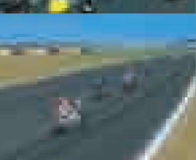
Another thing to consider is that this is further proof that developers are getting ready for the inevitable change that the next generation of consoles will bring to the market. And according to recent speculation, this could be a lot sooner than many people think…



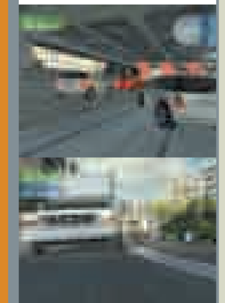


The Blimey engine has already been seen in *ATV 2*





A *Moto GP* game featuring Blimey 2 would be nice…



The Italian Job – an okay game, but it looked great

THE SECRET'S OUT

WE GO BEHIND THE SCENES TO FIND OUT WHAT MAKES BLIMEY 2 TICK

Although Climax does not want to discuss all of the games currently in development for its new graphics engine – even rolling demos would give away massive clues – it is more than happy to discuss the advances Blimey 2 will offer.

Although expectations for the new engine are high, Greg Michael, technical director of Climax Brighton, is confident that the new hardware will be able to deliver. "It's a much more flexible system to allow for new games consoles and platforms, [and] more efficient game development tools and technology," he said. "The rendering performance is also suitably enhanced over Blimey 1. Blimey has been in development in one form or another for about four years now and the accompanying documentation really helps new programmers get up to speed within a matter of days."

Critics have often derided the Blimey engine and see it as hardware that cannot exist outside its driving roots. However, as Michael explained, this simply isn't the case. "Blimey is not just a driving game engine," he said. "Blimey can be used to create a multitude of game genres – this was always one of its goals. Not only does Blimey support a fantastic vehicle system, it also supports superb character systems that allow for a much wider range of game genres. We have a number of rendering performance enhancements as well as extra special effects and features which will allow our future games to compete with the best games in development."

Another potential worry with cross-platform titles is that each machine may not be able to flex the graphical muscles that it may have over its counterparts. Once again, though, Michael was quick to state that this will not be the case. "We have specialists in all of the target platforms working on Blimey to ensure that each console/hardware platform performs to the best of their abilities".

Climax's *Moto GP* series is easily the most popular franchise that currently uses the Blimey engine, so what are the chances of a follow-up for it? "Climax would certainly love to continue this wonderful game," said Michael. "However, I can't say much more than that at the moment."

If we find out any more, we'll let you know…

BLIMEY 2 PERFORMANCE SPECS

- Four-pass Renderer – 12 million poly/sec
- Sprite Renderer – 6 million sprites/sec (12 million polys/sec, fully textured)
- Terrain Renderer – 10 million poly/sec
- Textures – 12Mb per frame, fully managed
- Hundreds of interactive objects in one scene
- 32 players online

Data Stream
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING

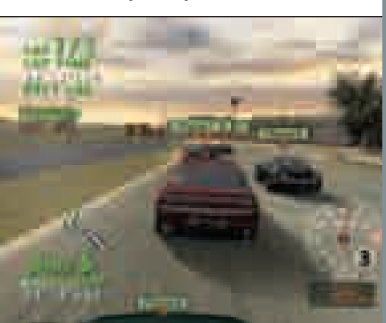


COME TOGETHER
In order to create one of the biggest online presences in gaming, web-based firms IGN and GameSpy have signed a merger agreement. The deal is expected to be finalised within the first half of 2004 and the two companies will continue to operate as separate entities. Despite this fact, the newly formed conglomerate is already boasting about page views and visitor counts for the combined sites that, unsurprisingly, ranks it (or them) as the most popular web page(s). But don't forget that there are still plenty of good independent sites around.





AMERICA ON-LIVE
Considering it's the world's number-one ISP, it never ceases to amaze us that AOL offers no support for online console gaming. All this is set to change in the near future, however, as the firm is currently in the process of beta testing systems that will grant PS2 and Xbox owners access to the wonderful world of online gaming. It's unknown at this time if and when this will be made available to Joe Public but, fingers crossed, users should be fragging like mad early next year. More soon.





SO, WHAT DOES IT DO?

SONY'S PSX SUFFERS CUTBACKS IN THE RUN-UP TO CHRISTMAS

Remember this? "The 'X' in PSX refers to the crossover of games and electronics, but it also stands for extraordinary." Those words were spoken by Sony's president, Ken Kutaragi, when Sony revealed its allegedly ground-breaking PSX. Now, seven months after these claims were first made, it would appear that Sony has bitten off more than it could chew.

Just weeks before the PSX was launched in Japan, Sony revealed that it would be a very different beast to the machine that was initially unveiled. What's alarming, though, is the number of features that Sony had to cut in order to achieve that lucrative Christmas sales slot. For starters, the ability to use the popular DVDR+W was taken out. Sony also decided to remove the facility to play CD-R data discs, although this is obviously an attempt to combat the piracy that will inevitably surface.

Further cuts mean that consumers will no longer be able to run movies that have been shot with the popular Sony CyberShot digital camera range, and the ability to handle image formats like TIFF and GIF has also been lost. Playing MP3 music files will no longer be an option and the machine's hard-drive copying abilities have been halved from an impressive 24X speed to a mere 12X-speed model.

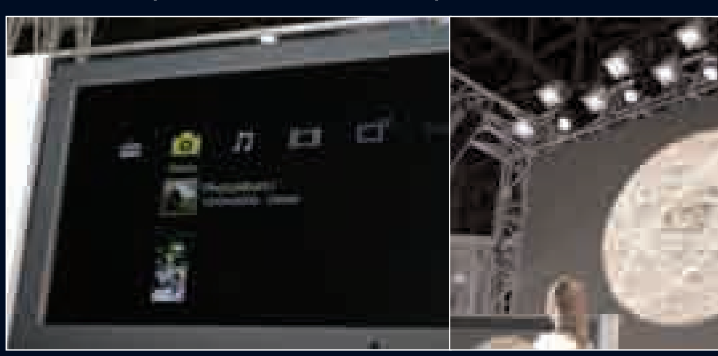
The most ludicrous omission, however, has to be the lack of broadband support, especially as Sony made such a big issue about it. So not only will you be unable to download any content to your machine, you won't be able to play PS2 titles online, something we think is a huge mistake.

Considering that the PSX is supposed to be the ultimate home entertainment system, the decision to remove these key

It sounded so promising but now the PSX won't deliver.



For all its fancy looks, the hardware is disappointing.





The rush to get the PSX out in Japanese stores before Christmas is believed to be the main reason for the abandonment of most of the machine's key features.



"WE PLANNED SOME FEATURES SUCH AS CD-R PLAYBACK AND PLAYSTATION BROADBAND BUT WE DECIDED TO DROP SUCH FEATURES. WE [WERE] NOT ABLE TO COMPLETE TESTING OF SOME FORMATS BEFORE THE HOLIDAY SEASON"

TARO TAKAMINE, SONY CONSUMER ELECTRONICS JAPAN

features is going to be frustrating for anyone who's already ordered the now over-rated piece of hardware.

"We have changed the specification," revealed Taro Takamine, a spokesman for Sony Consumer Electronics Japan. "Basically, as of 7 October, we planned some features such as DVDR+W playback, CD-R playback, TIFF and GIF support, and PlayStation BroadBand, but we decided to drop such features. We [were] not able to complete testing of some formats before the holiday shopping season. Our priority is to launch before the end of the year."

With all these omissions, you have to wonder why Sony was so insistent on getting the product out on time. After all, it would have made more sense to delay the product and make good on what was promised, rather than undermine consumer confidence (which the release is bound to do).

Another question to consider is that if Sony is willing to produce the PSX way below its original specifications in order to rush it into shops, what's to say that the same thing won't happen at a later date? Suddenly the PSP and PS3 don't sound quite as exciting…

BANDAI QUITS THE HARDWARE RACE

WONDERSWAN IS BANDAI'S LAST HARDWARE VENTURE

After having reasonable success in Japan with its Wonderswan series, Bandai has now decided to pull out of the hardware side of the industry and instead focus on developing software. The recent revelation came after Bandai's president, Takeo Takasu, mentioned to Japanese newspaper *Mainichi Shimbun* that Bandai would now focus on pushing its current range of popular animation and character licences. The recent release of Nintendo's Red Gundam GameCube pack, complete with a huge Gundam robot (or is that Mecha?), has already whipped importers into a frenzy, and Bandai is promising that all current consoles will continue to benefit from future Bandai products – yes, even the Xbox if sales pick up (although Nintendo's recent interest may suggest otherwise).







NOT ANOTHER…

NINTENDAI STORY

THE NINTENDO AND BANDAI PLOT BEGINS TO THICKEN…

It's amazing how much can change in a month. After mentioning Nintendo's interest in Bandai and the possibility of a takeover (which both companies denied) last issue, it appears that there's more going on than everyone thought. Bandai even held a special conference in Tokyo so it could publicly dismiss the numerous rumours. However, a recent interview with Makoto Yamashina, a Bandai director, in a Japanese business magazine (which has subsequently appeared on several websites) has revealed a few surprises.

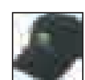
Bandai's stock is widely distributed between its shareholders and even Yamashina-san (son of Bandai's founder) only holds 5.2 per cent; as a result, the 2.7 per cent held by Nintendo has suddenly become a very large investment. It would appear that Bandai's CEO, Takeo Takasu, encouraged Yamashina-san to sell shares to Nintendo in mid-August. Worried about his family's diminishing grip on the company, Yamashina-san declined.

Nintendo has apparently secured a strategic holding via the UFJ Bank that provides corporate services for both Bandai and Nintendo, as well as having a six per cent stock stake in Bandai itself. Nintendo bought its stock from UFJ and is now one of the biggest shareholders in the company. So maybe there will be a merger after all…



Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



SELL, SELL, SELL

Ex-NVIDIA employee David Chang found himself $116,000 worse off last month after the Securities and Exchange Commission of America reached a final ruling in his case. Chang was one of 16 employees charged with insider dealing after they used information from a confidential email to buy NVIDIA shares. Advance news of a deal with Microsoft allowed the involved parties to invest before the deal went public and the share price rose. With the recent *Half-Life 2* issues, this is last thing NVIDIA needs. Still, it probably seemed like a great idea at the time…

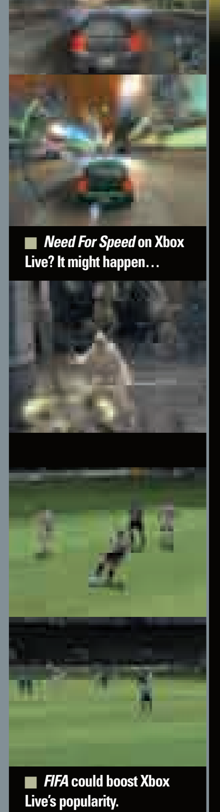




CAUGHT IN THE ACT

Almost a year after it filed for bankruptcy protection, flagging peripheral company InterAct has been saved from the jaws of liquidation by US firm Intec. At one point in the Nineties, InterAct products accounted for almost three quarters of all third-party peripherals sold, but rest assured that Intec won't be letting the once-proud line die. Apparently, the world is still hungry for affordable peripherals with a long-standing reputation, and Intec hopes to turn the brand's fortunes around and dominate the market again.





Need For Speed on Xbox Live? It might happen…

FIFA could boost Xbox Live's popularity.

A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN?

MICROSOFT AND ELECTRONIC ARTS RE-ENTER XBOX LIVE NEGOTIATIONS

While we're quite happy to go tearing around in *Project Gotham Racing 2*, or shooting unsuspecting team-mates during a game of *Rainbow Six 3*, we're aware that for many Xbox Live owners, something is missing. That something is Electronic Arts, which has so far refused to play ball with Microsoft and has instead decided to support Sony's PlayStation2 and its own online servers.

Though it's by no means a poor service, going online with a PlayStation2 isn't in the same league as using Xbox Live. Indeed, current online games from EA only allow one-on-one gaming – not the sort of revolution you'd expect from Sony. So it will come as no surprise to learn that EA and Microsoft have re-started negotiations about joining forces online. The firms have discussed joint operations before, though talks broke down after both sides expressed reservations; Microsoft was unhappy that EA wanted to turn off existing servers whenever an update was released, while EA objected to the amount of control Microsoft would have over its servers.

"EA currently have a great relationship with Microsoft and we support the Xbox platform with more than 20 titles in development right now," said Glen O'Connell, head of PR for Electronic Arts UK. "However, at the present time our policy on not supporting the online offering from Microsoft remains unchanged. We don't anticipate resolving this situation soon, although EA will continue to work with Microsoft and does feel the discussions are heading in the right direction."

While many gamers feel that Microsoft needs EA's lucrative sports licences to succeed, this isn't a view held by Microsoft. "Although we'd welcome EA's participation in Live, our vision for online gaming is not dependent on any one developer or any one game," said a company spokesperson. "Our vision is about innovation, content and services powering the future of the Digital Entertainment Lifestyle."

Regardless of what happens with EA, Xbox Live is evolving, with the latest experiment being premium download content. Currently only available for *MechAssault*, the premium content includes three new maps and two new multiplayer modes for $5 (around £3.50). It will be interesting to see how the new content is received, and perhaps Microsoft will continue to give gamers a choice between standard and premium packages.

ROCKSTAR'S VICE CITY COMES UNDER FIRE YET AGAIN

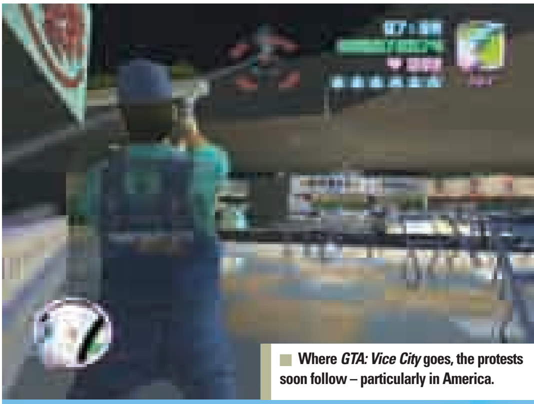
KICK 'EM WHILE THEY'RE DOWN

It seems that *GTA: Vice City's* notoriety knows no bounds. No sooner does it get released on the Xbox than angry mobs are lining up to take a pot shot at it. The latest group to complain are angry Haitians who are claiming the game is racist.

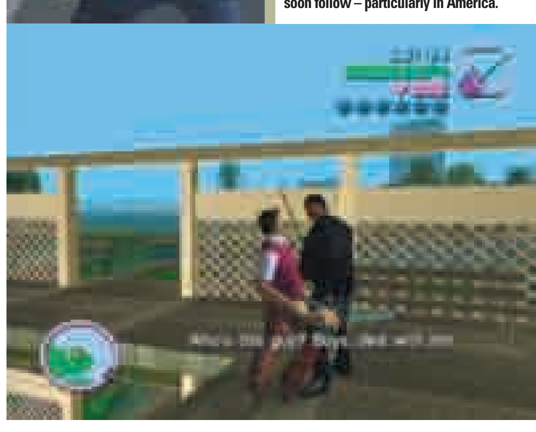
The majority of protests started after the American TV station CBS aired a section entitled 'Shame on You' and accused Rockstar of "cashing in on racism and violence". One aspect of the game has caused outrage in certain circles, namely a line of dialogue that runs: "I hate those Haitians. We'll take them out, we'll take those Haitians down."

Activists from the Haitian Centers Council are furious about the slur, with its director, Dr Henry Frank, saying: "To kill the Haitians like beasts, like nothing, you are attacking our self-esteem, our respect and everything that we have." However, Dr Frank does not account for the fact that the line simply refers to a rival gang that happens to be comprised of Haitians, rather than meaning 'all Haitians in games must be killed'.

Rockstar Games has refused to comment and is no doubt wondering where CBS managed to find the individual who stated: "You have to have a strong mind to be able to play this game and not want to go out and kill people." Sadly, it looks like the only party that's likely to benefit from this controversy is Rockstar, as all publicity is inevitably good publicity…

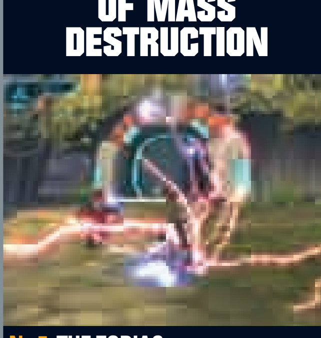


Where *GTA: Vice City* goes, the protests soon follow – particularly in America.



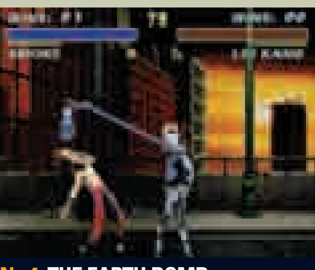
games™ THE TOP FIVE

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION



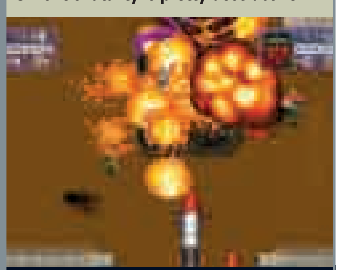
No.5 THE ZODIAC

Better than an Omniwrench any day



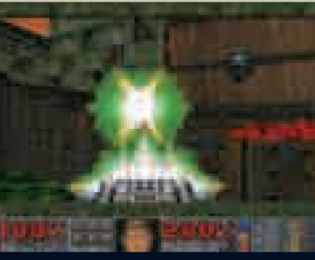
No.4 THE EARTH BOMB

Smoke's fatality is pretty destructive…



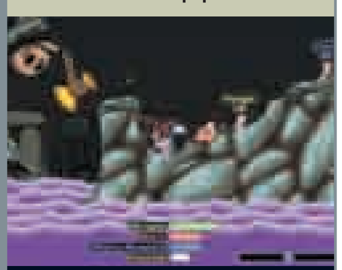
No.3 THE AIRSTRIKE

Big money, big explosions – we love it



No.2 THE BFG

It made mass death popular



No.1 THE HOLY HAND GRENADE

"The Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch!"



NINTENDO CELEBRATES THE LAUNCH OF ITS LATEST GBA SP COLOURS

GBA TAKES OFF

Despite releasing a string of consistently excellent titles, Nintendo has always found it extremely difficult to shed its 'kiddie' image. So it was unsurprising that a recent competition to launch the new Arctic Blue and Flame Red Game Boy Advances was something that wouldn't really appeal to the average 12-year-old gamer. To tie in with the machine's 15-hour battery life, Nintendo offered a jet-set trip to New York, where the lucky winner would get to spend 15 hours living out the life of a rock star.

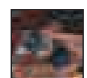
"I entered the competition on the internet, answered a simple question, and won the competition," revealed the extremely pleased winner, Patrick Maguire, a manager of London's Barbican Centre. Patrick and his wife, Karen, were treated to first-class flights before being driven around New York by a professional limousine driver and spending time with their own personal stylist (as well as getting over $1,000 spending money). They ended up at the New York MTV studios and finished the evening in the swanky Buffalo 8 nightclub.

Nintendo's collaboration with MTV was a massive success and is something that the winners will no doubt remember for some time. "There is nothing wrong with flying trans-Atlantic first class, staying in luxury hotels, eating in the best restaurants, being driven around New York in a limousine and wearing the best clothes," said Patrick. "Absolutely nothing wrong with it at all…"

But does the fact that Nintendo is willing to splash out on a mere GBA colour update show a great deal of confidence in the handheld or is it an attempt to rally in the face of Sony and Microsoft?

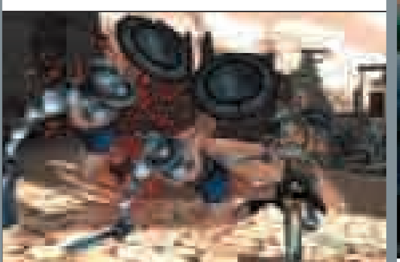
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



'BLOOD-VERTISING'

You can always count on good old Acclaim to come through with a baffling publicity stunt for its latest games, and *Gladiator: Sword Of Vengeance* is no exception. To promote the so-called 'bloodiest game ever', special adverts were put up that actually released 'blood' over the space of a week, trickling down the poster and onto the pavement below. The ever-thoughtful firm even employed cleaners to remove the faux claret from the sullied streets, but who's going to pay to get our ruined trainers scrubbed up?

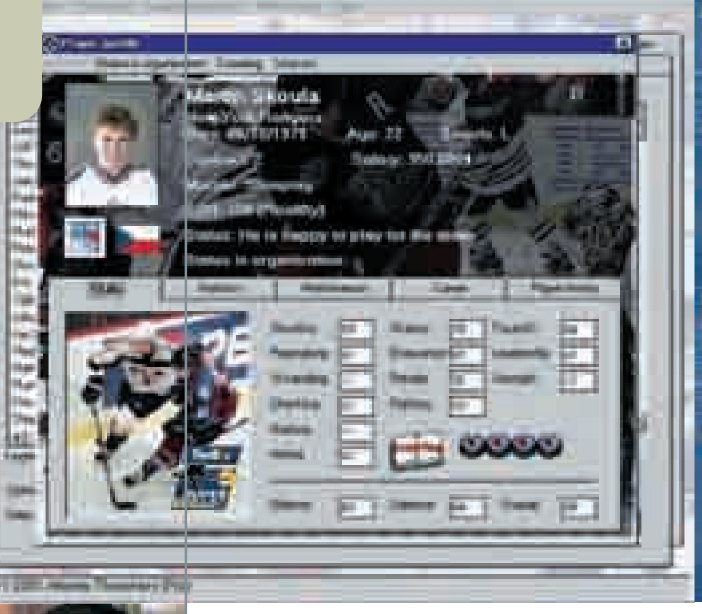


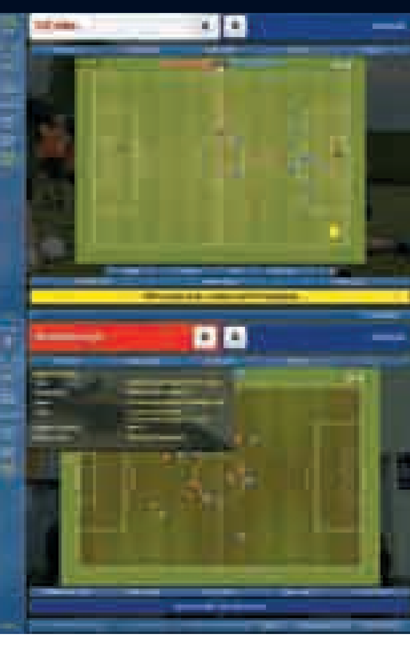


NVID1A L0$3S TH3 PL0+

In a somewhat bizarre contest staged through its American website, PC hardware giant NVIDIA is looking for its most 'L337 pH4n5' (its biggest fans, for those not fluent in internet gibberish) to win a selection of its hardware products or a trip to its next product launch. The competition's homepage at www.nvidia.com/object/IO_9912.html is the most confusing part of this contest, written entirely in a manner more befitting of the Busted message board than a high-profile games industry player (although someone's bound to translate the damn thing). B10od¥ S+uP1d 1D10+t$…





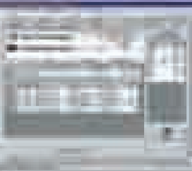




Miles Jacobson – swapping balls for pucks.



Management fans will be in hockey stat heaven.



It's more glam than the Beezer Homes League…

SPORTS INTERACTIVE'S NEW SIGNING

THE CHAMP MANAGER BRAINS PLAY ICE HOCKEY WITH SEGA

When Sports Interactive announced it would be terminating its long-term publishing contract with Eidos, many wondered which lucky publisher would snap up the talented team. Few would have guessed it would be SEGA Europe and even fewer would have expected SI's next game to be an ice hockey title…

Already a huge success as a freeware game on the PC, *Eastside Hockey Manager* is about to hit the mainstream. Fans of the original version will be pleased to learn that Sports Interactive has included plenty of new features in the update. "There is a huge difference between the two, although the background technology is similar," said SI's managing director, Miles Jacobson. "Basically, the team have worked very hard to turn what was a very good and addictive freeware game into a proper commercial product, and the quality of the first release of *Eastside Hockey Manager* will be similar to that of our previous *ChampMan 01/02*."

The partnership with SEGA Europe should ensure the title will receive a high-profile release, and Jacobson explained that the decision to join forces with the publisher was an easy one to make. "From the first meeting we had with them [SEGA], we all got on really well," he said. "They have great plans for the future, and are a truly global publisher, which is something that was very important to us."

Of course, many gamers will want to know if this marks the end of Sports Interactive's football titles, but Jacobson isn't revealing anything yet. "We will be announcing our plans regarding football titles in February 2004," he said. "However, we'd have to be insane to not use our last 11 years' experience by stopping making football games."

With the more recent *Championship Manager* games escaping their PC confines and arriving on the Xbox, it's possible that a similar thing is likely to happen with *Eastside Hockey Manager*, though nothing has been decided yet. "We haven't spoken to Microsoft about it yet at length, but it's certainly a possibility," said Jacobson. "We'd love our games to be on as many formats as possible, but consoles are often geared towards graphical prowess rather than processor power, which makes it hard for us."

Rest assured, regardless of which formats Sports Interactive's games appear on, sports fans are going to have a very enjoyable 2004…

COMPUTER CLOTHING RANGE ARRIVES ON THE HIGH STREET

JUNKIES GO MAINSTREAM

After impressing hardcore gamers with its range of kitsch retro game t-shirts, Joystick Junkies has finally hit the big time. By the time you read this, the likes of River Island and several other high-street stores will be stocking Joystick Junkies' new range of clothing, so you can judge for yourself just how much influence retro gaming is currently having.

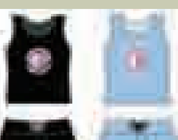
"We've been going for nearly three years now, so it's taken a lot of work to win the support of everyone we needed," said Chris Birch, head of Joystick Junkies. "We've been in a few smaller stores before but never on this scale, and it took a while to get to the point where River Island saw us as a valuable addition to their store."

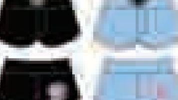
Joystick Junkies is well known throughout the industry for organising parties with top DJs and lots of free retro games to play. The company has also made a games-inspired compilation CD that Birch hopes will give the music market plenty of competition when it's released next year.

"We've got some really great names on there and as a compilation CD it's going to stand up very well against all the other CDs on the market," he said. For more information on Joystick Junkies, visit www.joystickjunkies.com.



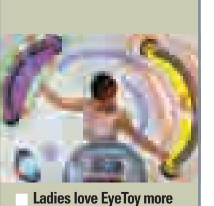
Retro-themed gaming t-shirts in a store near you.





There's even fancy kit for girls into games.





Ladies love EyeToy more than rugby, apparently…

GAME GIRLS ADVANCE

FIGURES REVEAL A NEW TREND IN FEMALE GAMING

According to recent retail research, more and more women are regularly buying games for their own enjoyment. Videogames chain Game revealed its findings after it made concerted efforts to attract female gamers. The store ran adverts in women's magazines and set aside areas in its branches for games that may appeal to women. Titles such as *Grabbed By The Ghoulies*, *Dance UK* and the ever-popular EyeToy are believed to be the main reasons for female interest in gaming.

"The release of these games in such a short space of time shows that women in the UK do have the appetite to play games, it's just a matter of producing the right kind," said Anna Macario, marketing director of Game. A change in the TV schedules towards the end of the year is also thought to have been a reason for the upsurge in lady gamers. "The Rugby World Cup has been on prime-time TV, and during that time we've seen an increase in the number of games being bought by women," said Macario. "We believe they may be looking for a diversion while their boyfriends, husbands or flatmates are watching all the sporting action. Ultimately, however, they are looking for interactive games that are going to engage them."

With gaming becoming more and more accessible, our favourite pastime could well start a new domestic argument – who gets to play *Mario* first…

Female gamers chose a game about ghoulies…

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



Obviously, we're in no position to query your judgement (seeing as we get enough of that from various internet forums every month) but we have to ask one thing – what on earth were you thinking? Here we are, offering our opinion on some of the best – and worst – games of the year, and while we'd never expect you to actually make all your buying decisions based on what we think, we'd hope at least that you might see our point when we say something's good or bad. But it would appear that this isn't enough and, as such, most of the best-selling games of the Christmas period have been pretty disappointing in terms of quality.

Okay, so maybe we're just venting our anger, and if you're reading this then you're probably the kind of gamer who knows their own mind and can tell the difference between a good and bad game. But the fact that some of the best games we've played all year have failed miserably while the dross has risen to the top really does make us wonder if all this is really worth it. *Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun* at number one? Honestly, we might as well just pack up and go home right now… or at least, we would if we had anywhere to go.



Beyond Good & Evil is a great game, but it didn't make a dent on the Top 40 All-Formats Game Chart – disgraceful.

This is what you were all buying last month and we couldn't be more disappointed. Great adverts don't make it a great game, you know…

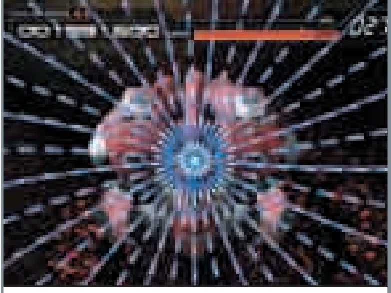


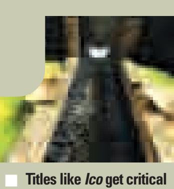
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



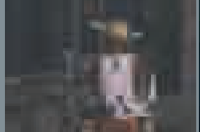
SHOOT TO KILL

While the internet is full of 'bring game X to console Y' petitions, it's extremely rare that anyone ever takes notice of these. But, clearly intent on proving us wrong, Success has recently announced that Naomi shooter *Psyvariar 2* will be finding a new home on the Dreamcast in February. Naturally, this won't be gracing UK shores (at least not as a PAL release) so fans of crazy, nigh-on impossible shooters will want to start saving their yen now. Still, it's interesting to see just how much clout SEGA's ill-fated console still holds in its homeland, and with fans currently requesting a Dreamcast release for *SNK Vs Capcom Chaos*, the console looks to be going strong.





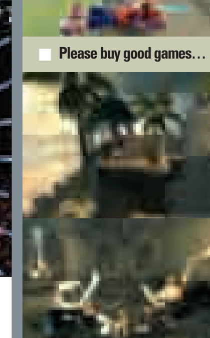
Titles like *Ico* get critical acclaim but simply don't sell.



WHAT'S GOING ON WITH THE GAMES TOP TEN THEN?



Please buy good games…





STOP THE MADNESS

In the run-up to Christmas, it's obvious that certain games will suffer as customers blindly rush out to buy the latest 'hot titles'. But we were surprised (and dismayed) to learn the fates of *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* and *Beyond Good & Evil*; even an exclusive Christmas deal with Sony has not been enough to save them. Despite being a skilled athlete with a great game to his name, Persia's favourite prince is struggling to gain a foothold in the multiformat charts, and at the time of going to press is dangling precariously at number 33, whilst *BG&E* doesn't even appear in the top 40.

Unfortunately, it would seem that the masses simply aren't interested in innovative material. "It's not just Ubisoft who are suffering, I suspect, although their spirit and others is to be commended," said Stuart Ledger, PR director of MK Communications. "Unless your title is bolstered by a strong brand or licence, a media partner or third-party endorsement then frankly it's not going to happen. To be fair to the likes of EA, they've got their brand pollination model down to a tee and they are finally delivering some decent games, although they have had years of practice."

Of course, another thing to consider is how different it would have been if the two titles had appeared on all three formats. It would seem that an exclusive licence (no matter how well-executed) is no longer a sure-fire way to improve sales…



SONY RELEASES ITS PS2 IN PIRACY-STRICKEN CHINA

BEHIND THE RED CURTAIN

By the time you read this, Sony will have launched its PlayStation2 in China, despite concerns about software and hardware piracy. Sony is adamant that it will make the PS2 a success in the notorious territory, even though the company's chairman, Hiroshi Shoda, has admitted that piracy will never be totally eliminated.

Sony has made several bold moves to ensure that the launch is successful; while we're not convinced that its projected price of 1,988 yuan (around £140) is a sound idea, selling games for an extremely low 168 Yuan (£12) almost certainly is.

To maintain interest in the console, Capcom, SEGA, Konami and Taito are just a few of the developers who are expected to follow Sony to the new territory. By expanding into China, Sony should be able to make gains in a market that has, until now, remained untapped. Nintendo announced plans in September to launch a modified GameCube in China, but will Sony's global branding win out?

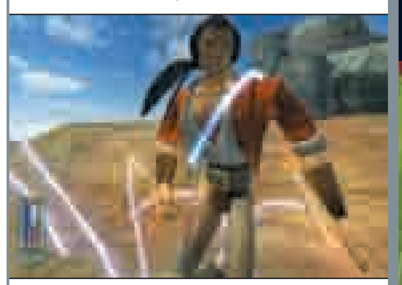


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



DEJA VU

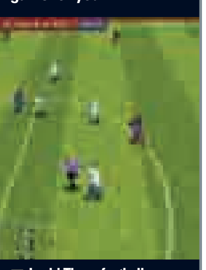
It looks like *Galleon* may at long last be coming into dock. Toby Gard's long-awaited project has finally found a new publisher after languishing in development hell for what seems like an eternity. SCi has secured a new deal for *Galleon* to appear as an Xbox exclusive and insiders are insisting that we'll definitely see the pirate-based game by the end of spring 2004. *Galleon* has been due to appear on several machines (including the Dreamcast) over the last five years and promises to fully expand on the gameplay created by the original *Tomb Raider*. Let's just hope it's better than *Angel Of Darkness*…



Mobile game of the month

FIFA FOOTBALL 2004

Despite our initial misconceptions about a mobile football game, *FIFA Football 2004* actually delivers. Sure, it's never going to compete with the likes of *FIFA* on the home console formats, but for some reason it's all the better for it. Graphics are wonderfully sharp, and despite the N-Gage's bizarre screen layout this title doesn't suffer from any gameplay problems. Controls are nice and responsive and goals are actually down to skill as opposed to simply blind luck. If you're looking for a sports fix on the way to work, this is the perfect game for you.



■ Look! Those footballers look like ants. Or are they…?

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN…

NOKIA'S N-GAGE SUFFERS YET ANOTHER SETBACK



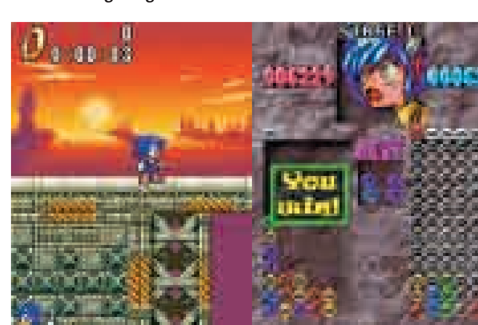
Poor Nokia. Not only are its sales claims for the N-Gage a little optimistic, but the machine has already been hacked. Just weeks after the phone was released, pirates had already found ways of porting its software over to other mobile devices.

So far, the only phones that are able to use the pirated software are other Symbian mobile phones such as the Nokia Series 60 models and various Siemens handsets. Unsurprisingly, the websites that showed the likes of *Sonic N* and *Tomb Raider* running on current Siemens phones have already been forced to take down the offending images and, judging by Nokia's recent official statement, it's determined to bring these culprits to justice.

"We take these types of intellectual property offences very seriously," the statement says. "We have initiated an aggressive program to stop individuals and/or entities that are behind these intellectual property violations. Nokia will work co-operatively with ISPs, auction sites and the relevant authorities to pursue all actions and remedies available to stop this illegal activity. We are also working to continually develop our copy protection mechanisms to make it's even more difficult to do this in the future."

Of course, it's all very well taking such an aggressive attitude, but we feel it's unlikely that Nokia will be able to achieve anything. Piracy has plagued the industry ever since tape recorders were invented, and while the mobile-phone giant may be able to track down a few perpetrators, we think its time would be better spent creating stronger security measures.

Unlike piracy on the PlayStation (which many believe actually helped Sony shift consoles) the fact that N-Gage games are being played on non-N-Gage hardware simply compounds the blow Nokia has been dealt. The N-Gage has faced problems ever since its release and this latest episode is unlikely to restore faith in the market that Nokia is targeting.



We've teamed up with those fine people at GAME to offer you a £3 discount voucher, thus ensuring your hard-earned cash will stretch just that little bit further. And with your pockets undoubtedly empty after a festive spending spree, it's never been more useful.



> **"WE'RE HOPING THAT GOBLIN COMMANDER PROVES A POINT, AND THEN OUR FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS WILL BE ABLE TO EXPAND ON THAT POINT"**
>
> *RON MILLAR, JALECO ENTERTAINMENT*

RON AND CHRIS MILLAR

JALECO

There are many names in the industry that are synonymous with producing quality titles, although how recognisable they are depends on which games you're into. Miyamoto? Mario and everything Nintendo, obviously. Molyneux? Lord of the god games, from *Populous* to *Black & White*. But what about the Millar brothers? No ideas? That could be because you're not a PC gamer with a taste for RTS titles. As part of the Blizzard legacy of *Warcraft*, *Starcraft* and *Diablo* (and many more besides), the pair are famous in the right circles. Not they'd tell you that – despite their success, the Millars are still pretty modest.

"We've been fortunate to work with a lot of really great people – it's not just me and Chris making the games," insists Ron Millar, a veteran of 14 years in the industry with more than enough successful design credits on his CV. "We want to make games that we want to play and we hope everyone else will too, but we also want to get away from the 'me too' crowd rather than making another fighting game or another racing game, because there's already too many of those out there. We've been that person in the store that saved their pocket money for a month and then spent it on a crap game, but played it anyway because you felt you had to. There's a lot of that out there right now, so we try to make games that we'd want to play instead of just sticking to the norm."

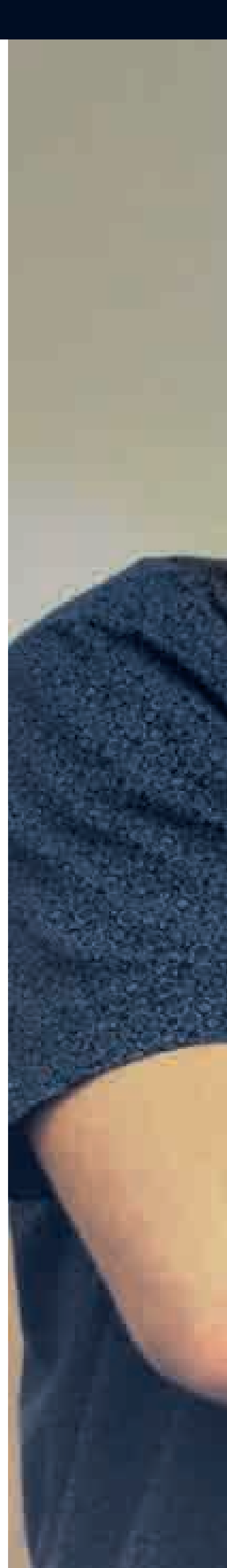
As we're seeing all too often, the norm is exactly what the industry wants right now; with many publishers unwilling to find the money needed to make a game unless they're guaranteed a return, some games that show promise aren't seen to be worth the risk. *Goblin Commander*, the Millars' most recent foray into the RTS genre, might be an exception but it's one of only a few that spring to mind in today's industry climate.

"It's definitely happening," agrees Chris Millar, producer at Jaleco and Ron's younger brother. "Publishers are only willing to back stuff that makes money, and so those guys with original ideas and small development companies are losing out; they won't even look at you right now unless you have a working demo and a team with a track record." But it's not just the developers that are missing out due to short-sightedness in the industry. "I think gamers are limited in terms of what you can play or buy," says Chris, "because publishers spend so much money advertising to buyers who don't even play games [that] the people who put the games on the shelves sometimes don't know what's good and what's not."

While many higher-ups within the industry may rush to disagree, it's a point that has to be addressed. Still, there are always opportunities for breakthrough. When someone picks up on a genre that no-one else is doing, it makes people wake up, and that's exactly what the Millar brothers are hoping to do with their latest project. "I think that *Goblin Commander* is going to prove that you can actually make an RTS on a console, but not in the way that people will think it can be," says Ron. "We're not just taking something like *Command & Conquer* and moving it onto a console, assuming it'll work; we're going to take new steps that seem pretty obvious, like having direct control over your troops and using them to smash through buildings."

The brothers' attitude to development is refreshing too, taking a decidedly freeform approach. "When we make games, it's not a case of just taking a formula and applying it to the console," says Ron. "Every day, it's like 'Hey! It'd be cool to have a huge spiked ball that rolls around and crushes everything!' and then we move ideas forward from there, because it's fun that way. We're not very structured in the way the design works, but it works." Unconventional it may be, but there's no doubt that the Millars enjoy what they do. Constantly joking and laughing, it's strange to think that the duo are most renowned for working with a fairly serious genre, even if *Goblin Commander* does go some way to bridging the gap. Nevertheless, some of the pair's plans for the future (such as "*Mario Party* meets *Conker*, but for the *Tony Hawk* generation") look even more ambitious… "We've got stacks of ideas," confides Chris, "but I don't know if we've got enough time in our lives to do them all. There's only so much time to focus on projects and we're working on things in the background all the time, but I think there's always room for us to have crazy ideas and, hopefully, in the future, some of those might make it."

Goblin Commander: Unleash The Horde is due out for PlayStation2, Xbox and GameCube in February '04 and is previewed on page 78.





games™ THE PLAYERS

THE JOURNEY FROM THE COLD AT BLIZZARD TO THE SUNNY CLIMES OF COLORADO-BASED JALECO HAS BEEN A BUMPY ONE FOR THE MILLAR BROTHERS. BUT THE QUEST TO PRODUCE CONSISTENTLY ORIGINAL GAMES WAS NEVER GOING TO BE SMOOTH SAILING…



GOING LIVE

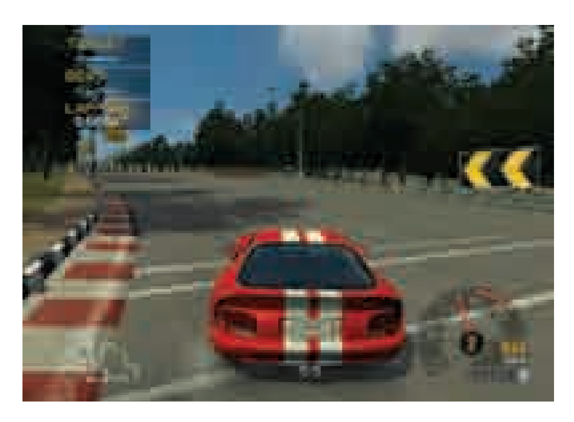
IT MIGHT HAVE TAKEN A WHILE, BUT XBOX LIVE IS GETTING MORE POPULAR BY THE DAY. THE SERVICE IS GOING FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH (DESPITE ITS CRITICS), AND THERE ARE SOME DAMN FINE GAMES TO PROVE IT…

Ever since Xbox Live launched early in 2003, we've been steadily tracking the service's progress and playing the latest releases (all in the name of research, you understand). Indeed, we can often be found battling away on *Unreal Championship* or *Top Spin* until the early hours of the morning, oblivious to the fact that there's work to do…

With Xbox Live becoming a key factor in Microsoft's festive strategy, we felt it was the perfect time to catch up with the many games that have been released since Live launched. With a selection of payment schemes now available for prospective buyers – including scratch cards, a new communicator bundle and the option of renewing your service monthly – there's never been a better time to find out what all the fuss is about.

Xbox Live has built a remarkable user base in such a short amount of time and currently hosts over half a million registered players throughout the world. Microsoft is hoping to double this figure by the end of the financial year, and judging by the amount of decent games finally coming out for the service, this may well be easier than it sounds.

CURRENT TITLES



Project Gotham Racing 2

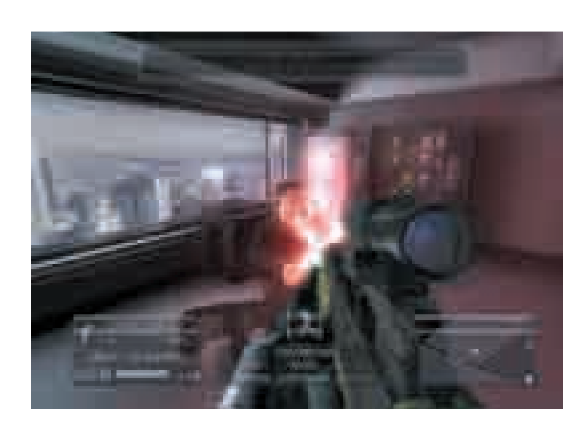
SOD VIN DIESEL, THIS IS THE REAL DEAL

There's little doubt that *Project Gotham Racing 2* will be the online event of the year for Xbox Live. Bizarre Creations has not only delivered a superb racer, but also created the most sophisticated use of Live to date. If you're connected to the service, every race you compete in will be captured for the gaming world to see. You'll also be able to download ghosts of the current fastest times and then try to beat them.

Unfortunately, you're unable to trade cars with other gamers, so if you want to be the proud owner of a full garage you'll have to earn them the hard way. Despite this niggle, we're extremely pleased with *PGR2*. Games are lag-free and support up to eight players at once, and Bizarre Creations has wisely opted to turn off the collision detection (though you can turn it back on), to ensure that foolish gamers don't spoil things by racing around tracks the wrong way. The current jewel in Xbox Live's crown.

VERDICT 10/10
THE FUTURE OF XBOX LIVE STARTS HERE

"BIZARRE CREATIONS HAS SEEMINGLY THOUGHT OF EVERYTHING TO ENSURE THAT YOU'LL BE PLAYING THIS WELL INTO NEXT YEAR"



Rainbow Six 3

IF IT MOVES, KILL IT, IF IT DOESN'T, KILL IT

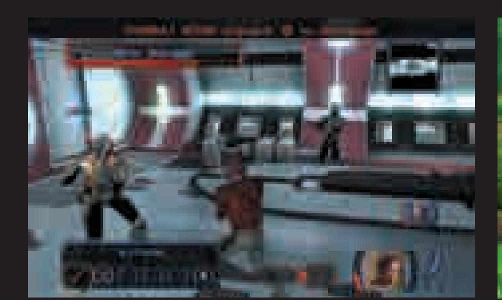
If you thought *Ghost Recon* was the ultimate in squad-based combat, you obviously haven't played *Rainbow Six 3*. Quite simply, this is the best squad title currently available for Xbox Live and blows the slower-paced *Ghost Recon* out of the water. There'll still be the detractors who will enjoy the more strategic gameplay that *Recon* offers, but this is the perfect alternative for gamers looking for a little more oomph.

Rainbow Six 3's tighter environments mean you'll constantly find yourself in tense gunfights, the likes of which have never before been seen on the system and which add a whole new level to online gaming. Like any good Live experience, lag is virtually non-existent (although connections of eight or more players are sometimes tested) so deathmatches are tense and hectic. Of course, there's always the option to team up with friends to take on the offline AI, which is equally as enjoyable. Instantly accessible and with a fantastic amount of gameplay, *Rainbow Six 3* is the best game of its genre on Xbox Live.

"RAINBOW SIX 3'S TIGHTER ENVIRONMENTS MEAN YOU'LL CONSTANTLY FIND YOURSELF INVOLVED IN TENSE GUNFIGHTS, THE LIKES OF WHICH HAVE NEVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE"

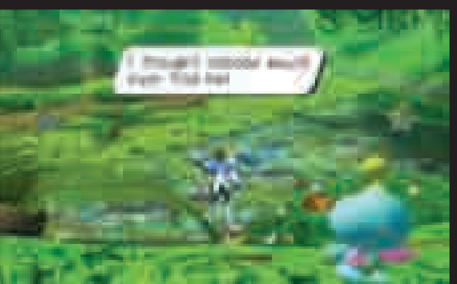
VERDICT 8/10
SHORT ON GAME CHOICES BUT STILL ESSENTIAL

DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT FOR GAMERS WHO WANT THAT LITTLE BIT EXTRA



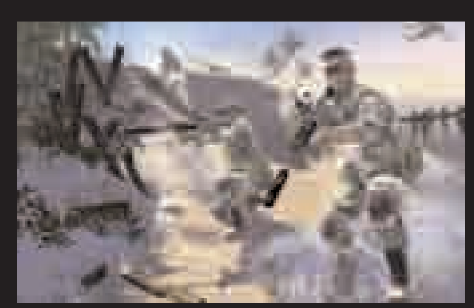
Knights Of The Old Republic

It's still a little way away, but the first download for Bioware's superb *Star Wars* RPG sounds pretty impressive. Rather than simply fobbing us off with some new downloadable guns, Bioware is promising the missing planet (yes, a whole planet) that will appear on the PC version of the game. We're already firing up our Lightsabers in anticipation…



Phantasy Star Online

Okay, we can't say we're too impressed about coughing up for that Hunter's Licence every month, but it could well pay off very soon. Rather than getting a new version of the game (like GameCube owners will receive from SEGA), lucky Xbox Live patrons will be able to download the extra levels and boss free of charge. We knew that hard drive was a good idea.



Ghost Recon: Island Thunder

Ubisoft's *Ghost Recon: Island Thunder* has already benefited from several new game maps, meaning that it's essential if you fancy some more strategic blasting. Unlike the majority of levels found in *Rainbow Six 3*, all the downloadable content takes place outside, meaning that there are plenty of sniping opportunities for devious players.

CURRENT TITLES

WHAT'S OUT NOW TO GET YOU GOING LIVE…

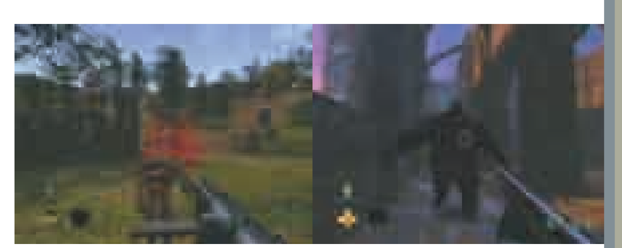
Return to Castle Wolfenstein

THOUGHT UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP WAS HECTIC? THINK AGAIN

Now this is more like it. Gamers who weaned themselves onto Live with *Unreal Championship* will be pleased to learn that *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* is the next logical step for the service. While we enjoyed fragging away on Atari's hardcore blaster, it couldn't prepare us for the sheer unbridled mayhem of *Wolfenstein*. Using team gaming to the full, this title has already built up a very respectable fan base since its release and now has a number of devoted clans who benefit from the competitiveness that *Wolfenstein* presents.

VERDICT 8/10

A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF A GREAT TEAM-BASED GAME



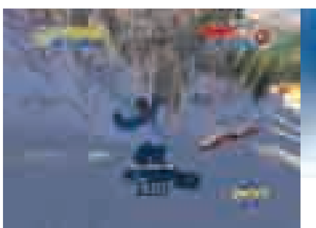
Amped 2

GETTING PISTE IN STYLE

***Amped 2* is the perfect example of a game you'll want to master offline before you play Live.** The original *Amped* wasn't the most accessible title, and its sequel is even less so. Nevertheless, once you've successfully negotiated the game's intricacies, you'll discover a rewarding title that really allows you to show off your new-found skills. Games are lag-free, contain an array of different events and, like the excellent *Top Spin*, are part of Microsoft's XSN range. Just make sure you look before you leap – some of those jumps are killers…

VERDICT 5/10

IT'S OKAY, BUT WE WERE EXPECTING SOMETHING BETTER





THE GANG'S ALL HERE

There's a staggering amount of Xbox Live games now available. While we've highlighted some of the best and worst examples, there are plenty more titles to look out for. Here's a list of everything else.

- **Capcom vs. SNK 2:EO**
  Players: 2
  Publisher: Capcom
- **Mech Assault**
  Players: 2-16
  Publisher: Microsoft
- **Midnight Club II**
  Players: 2-8
  Publisher: Rockstar
- **Moto GP Online**
  Players: 2-16
  Publisher: THQ
- **Moto GP 2**
  Players: 2-16
  Publisher: THQ
- **NFL 2K3**
  Players: 2
  Publisher: SEGA
- **NFL Fever 2003**
  Players: 2
  Publisher: Microsoft
- **NFL Fever 2004**
  Players: 2
  Publisher: Microsoft
- **NBA 2K3**
  Players: 2
  Publisher: SEGA
- **NHL 2K3**
  Players: 2
  Publisher: SEGA
- **NHL Hitz Pro**
  Players: 2
  Publisher: Midway
- **Outlaw Volleyball**
  Players: 2-4
  Publisher: TDK Mediactive
- **Star Wars: The Clone Wars**
  Players: 2-16
  Publisher: Activision
- **Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon**
  Players: 2-8
  Publisher: Ubisoft
- **Unreal Championship**
  Players: 2-16
  Publisher: Atari
- **Whacked**
  Players: 2-16
  Publisher: Microsoft
- **XIII**
  Players: 2-12
  Publisher: Ubisoft

The lovely ladies of *Outlaw Volleyball* want to meet you on Live.

Soldier Of Fortune II: Double Helix

OR HOW NOT TO MAKE A LIVE TITLE

While we're extremely impressed with the amount of great titles available on Xbox Live, we'd be the first to admit that there are a few stinkers on the service. *Soldier Of Fortune II* is a perfect example. Woefully average as a single-player experience, the chance to play online adds little to what is a very poor game. Quite why you'd want to play this over the likes of *Wolfenstein* and *Unreal Championship* is anyone's guess. Sure, a few easily pleased gamers will enjoy dismembering their foes for a few hours, but this really is a step back for Xbox Live.

VERDICT 4/10

DULL AND UNINSPIRED. YOU'VE PLENTY OF OTHER OPTIONS



Crimson Skies

CHOCKS AWAY, CHAPS

Like *Midtown Madness 3*, *Crimson Skies* is a game that really shows its true colours when it's played online. Featuring a variety of modes including Dogfight and the fantastic Chicken, *Crimson Skies* is a perfect example of what can be achieved on Microsoft's servers. Games contain massive environments and are impressively lag-free, and the ability to go up against 15 other planes means that your jaw will hit the floor as ships continually explode around you.



VERDICT 7/10

16-PLAYER DOGFIGHTS IMPROVE THE GAME

Midtown Madness

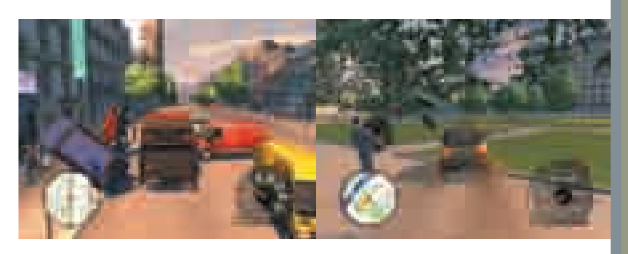
A GAME OF TWO HALVES

***Midtown Madness* is a classic example of a game that benefits from the magic of Xbox Live. Play offline and you'll soon find yourself drifting off, thanks to the extremely basic gameplay and the repetitiveness of the many missions.** Join a game online, however, and you'll swear you've stumbled across a completely different title.

There's a staggering amount of different options available, ranging from Capture The Gold (basically capture the flag), to Hunter (one player must turn everyone else Hunter by tagging them) and not a single duffer amongst them. This is also a great choice for someone who might find *PGR2* a bit intimidating. If you're a regular Live gamer, you really need to pick this up.

VERDICT 7/10

A SUPERB ALTERNATIVE TO THE SERIOUSNESS OF PGR2



Top Spin

ANYONE FOR TENNIS?

Microsoft is keen to push its new XSN sports brand and *Top Spin* may well be the game to do just that. While it might not have as many Live options as we would have liked, this is every bit as good online as it is off. Unfortunately, lag does rear its head every now and then (although not to the same extent as the near continuous problems of *Capcom vs. SNK*), and when this happens, it's best to just restart the game. Fortunately, this is an extremely rare occurrence and *Top Spin* is a must if you enjoy competitive play. Just watch out for those lobs…

VERDICT 8/10

MICROSOFT'S XSN RANGE GETS OFF TO A FANTASTIC START



"THIS IS BOUND TO BE AN EXTREMELY IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE WHEN IT'S RELEASED TOWARDS THE END OF 2004"

"TECMO IS REMAINING ANNOYINGLY TIGHT-LIPPED ABOUT THIS, BUT AS LONG AS THERE'S NO LAG WE'LL BE HAPPY"

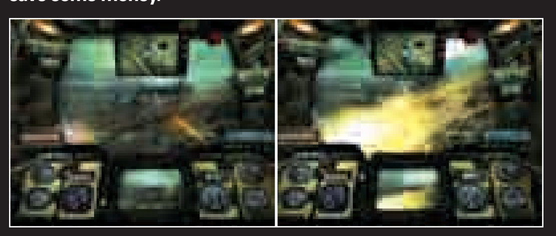
"RARE HAS GONE BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD TO ENSURE THAT CONKER'S LATEST GAME WILL BE AS FOUL AS HIS N64 OUTING"

…And now for some **Forthcoming Attractions**

THESE GAMES AREN'T OUT YET, BUT OH HOW WE WISH THEY WERE…

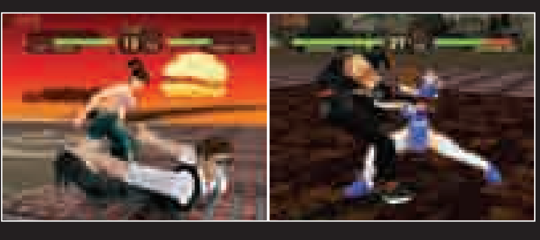
Steel Battalion: Line Of Contact

Is your *Steel Battalion* controller currently sitting in its massive box? Fear not, as Capcom has just started Beta testing the online sequel. Although it may not feature 16-player support, this is bound to be an extremely immersive experience when it's released towards the end of 2004. Capcom will be re-releasing the massive controller to celebrate the game's arrival, so if you don't want to pay an extortionate price on eBay, now's your chance to save some money.



Dead Or Alive Online

Little is known about Tecmo's online addition to its successful *Dead Or Alive* franchise; indeed, apart from a few screenshots, much of what we've heard is just speculation. We know that this isn't *Code Chronus* and that it will feature separate discs of both *Dead Or Alive 1* and *2*. Apart from that, however, Tecmo is remaining annoyingly tight-lipped on the subject. As long as there's no lag, we'll be more than happy; let's just hope Tecmo is up to the task.



Conker: Live & Uncut

Since its unveiling at this year's E3, poor old Conker is apparently having a bit of a rethink. While *Conker: Live & Uncut* certainly looked fun, its clunky controls and lack of innovation had us a touch worried. Unperturbed, Rare has gone back to the drawing board to ensure that Conker's latest adventure will be every bit as foul as his N64 outing. News has recently reached us that both the online and offline games (*Conker's Bad Fur Day* is included) have been expanded beyond recognition.





LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"A VIDEOGAME BLOCKBUSTER IS MUCH LIKE ITS CINEMATIC LOWBROW MUSH THAT PLEASANTLY INTOXICATES, OVERWHELMING

It is my experience that American gamers like big guns. The rocket launchers, the miniguns, the M60s – anything of sufficient size that it wouldn't look out of place bolted to an aircraft, I have found they like to run around firing in a videogame. Conversely, I've always been the type that found nothing more exhilarating than jamming a little shiny combat knife into the arm, head or torso of a bewildered bot. I appreciate the tactile nuances at play when thumbing a bow or flinging a shuriken; the restrictive demands of firing one critical round from a suppressed pistol or facing an oppressive enemy militia with only a 50-year-old half-wooden bolt-action rifle. Not so my American brothers. They seek one hundred per cent power in a hurry. They crave instant gratification without pause or dynamic. 'Gimme the thing that causes the most damage, makes the biggest noise and looks the coolest, and give it to me now.' What else from a nation that so gleefully dubs its most powerful non-nuclear weapon (the recently developed Massive Ordnance Air Blast, or MOAB) the 'Mother Of All Bombs'?

This extends beyond merely which direction American gamers will head down a digital hallway if there's a sniper rifle at one end and a bazooka at the other. As they are appeased by everything-on-eleven weaponry that provides the maximum sensational feedback, so too are they happy with entire games built around this principle. Nothing below the surface, the biggest, brightest and loudest sensations served up eagerly in return for very little investment of time, skill or effort from the player. My worry is not simply that this influences the design of games – you often hear people complain that Title A was 'dumbed down' with a US audience in mind – but that it is determining what games are made at all. It creates demand for a brasher, dumber style of game, and where American demand is created the world tends to follow. Movies such as *The Core*, *Daredevil* or *XXX* couldn't exist otherwise… and those spread to the rest of the planet in short order.

What I'm driving at is the dawn of the videogame blockbuster. They're much like their cinematic relatives: vulgar, expensive, lowbrow mush that pleasantly intoxicates, overwhelming the senses for the duration of the experience, but within a fortnight means no more to you than the popcorn-butter stain left on your shirt. A while ago, I reviewed *kill.switch* for another journal. That game exemplifies the concept. Was it fun? Yes, for as long as it lasted (which was under six hours) – it was running, gunning, baddie-bombing fun. Action-packed FMV sequences were beautifully produced (portraying some sort of ridiculous story), the music kicked, explosions rocked, scores of dastardly enemies

■ Muscles, tattoos, weaponry… they've taken over the cinema, and it'll be consoles next.



RELATIVES: VULGAR, EXPENSIVE, THE SENSES FOR ITS DURATION"

fell before an awesome spray of righteous fire. Then… nothing. No lingering 'I wonder if I missed something cool', or 'Maybe I could redo that level this way instead', or 'I'm getting right back at it until I unlock Mega Hyper Mode'. None of that at all. If these become as prevalent and unavoidable as their brain-dead Hollywood blockbuster equivalents, I may well have to gather up the canned foods I've been saving, along with the oil lamp and GBA, and head for the mountains. There I will remain until someone calls to say it's all over, Schwarzenegger is president, the aliens came and sorted out pollution and war, Rare surprised everyone by releasing *Perfect Dark Zero* exclusively for the raucously successful new Amiga, come on home.

At least for now we have a moderate underground resistance. I'm glad that *Viewtiful Joe* is very, very hard, instead of giving it all up right away like a cheap date. I'm glad that *Morrowind* is essentially so vast and deep that nobody can truly 'complete' it. I'm glad that I'm stuck on *Gitaroo Man* – if you can beat the drum 'n' bass space shark, please pop round. I'm glad that people are still losing hair trying to build bigger chains on *Ikaruga*. The question is, though, with the videogame equivalents of *Con Air* finding favour among a (growing) less refined audience, will the green light still be given to as many *Amélie*s, *Battle Royale*s, and *Hero*s?

Many thanks



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Mince Pies



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

New England Fall



WANT ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE SHAPE? THEN DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net HE MIGHT LISTEN, IF YOU'RE LUCKY

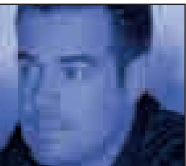
AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

LAST CALL

You've heard of Carson Daly – MTV's star VJ and once boyfriend of Tara Reid? They gave him his own show on NBC, in which he can fawn repulsively over hip icons of sound and screen. Bleugh.

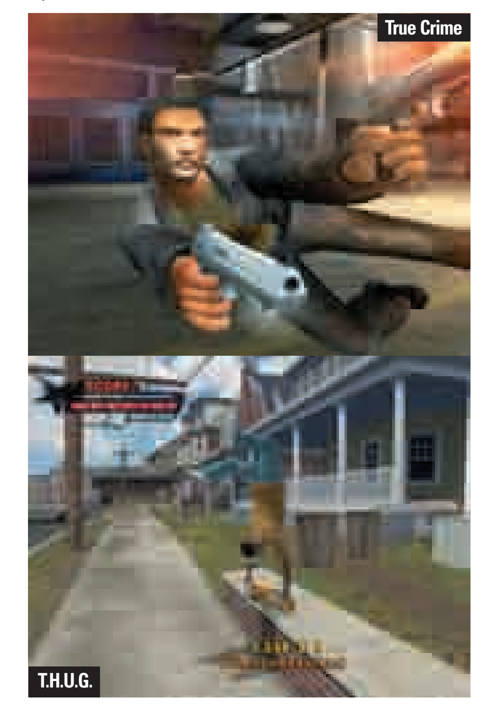




US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	True Crime: Streets Of LA	Activision	Multi
2	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Multi
3	Manhunt	Rockstar	PS2
4	Mario Party 5	Nintendo	GC
5	WWE Smackdown! Here Comes The Pain	THQ	PS2
6	Conflict: Desert Storm II	SCi	Multi
7	GTA: Double Pack	Rockstar	Xbox
8	Madden NFL 2004	EA Sports	Multi
9	The Simpsons: Hit And Run	Vivendi	Multi
10	NBA Live 2004	EA Sports	Multi

(Updated 1/12/03)



True Crime

T.H.U.G.



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"'THE JAPANESE ARE USED TO GOING THROUGH A LOT FOR A LITTLE,' THIS EXPLAIN THE END-HEAVY NATURE AND ANTICLIMAXES OF MOST

I don't like being lied to, no matter what country I'm in. It turns out that to the Japanese, though, lying is a part of everyday life. Ask the girl who works at Subway at the north exit of Ikebukuro Station and she'll tell you, 'Thank you very much for coming!' when really she just wishes you'd go home already and quit asking for extra ketchup.

Nobuo Uematsu, the esteemed composer of music from almost every game with *Final Fantasy* in the title, lied to me just a few weeks ago when I attended the concert of his rock-band side-project, The Black Mages, at the Kanagawa University Jindai Festa in Yokohama. They said the concert was going to be a big deal, or something, and it turned out to be just four songs – not one of which was the standard boss theme from *Final Fantasy IV* or the operatic 'One-Winged Angel' from *Final Fantasy VII*. After those four songs, the grinning MC said they were going to take a 'short break'. During this short break they played a bingo game in which Uematsu himself selected multicoloured balls out of a big wooden box. My ticket number was 501. I didn't win, and I have Uematsu to blame.

See, Uematsu could only pull out the blue balls – that is, the balls numbered three and seven. For an hour, Uematsu pulled the blue balls out of that box, resulting in victory only for people whose ticket numbers consisted of permutations of three and seven. When it got to the stage where no-one was winning, they called out the rest of the talented band, and at one point the numbers five and zero were drawn in that order. I prayed for the ¥10,000 prize – I could have used it. Then Uematsu was up next. He pulled a seven. Again. "That's his twenty-fourth seven tonight," I told my friend, through gritted teeth.

Two hours that bingo game lasted, and when it was done there was no more rock. Then the lights came up, and the band thanked us for coming. I got Uematsu's autograph outside through an act of serendipity. Then my friend and I hung around talking to some people about the show – they'd all loved it. They'd especially loved the performance of *Final Fantasy V*'s Gilgamesh theme, 'Clash on the Big Bridge'. Not a single Japanese person present at that show complained about the two-hour length of the bingo game, or the fact that only four people won anything. Many of them, I took it, were just delighted to see Uematsu; either that, or they were delighted to have time off work or school so they could come to the show. It was a Japanese national holiday, you see – Culture Day. There were actually two Japanese holidays that month, the next one being Working Thanksgiving Day. That was the next Monday. There were no videogame concerts scheduled for that day.

That night, after the concert, my friend and I were standing at



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON FOURTEEN: GETTING ANGRY

That's all you've got?!	Sore dake?!
What the hell?!	Nantoiukotoda?!
Honorable customer, sir, I'm sorry, there's no excuse…	O-kyaku-sama, moshiwake arimasenga…
Who the hell are you?!	Omae wa dare da?!
Oh, sorry. I'm, uh… going to go kill a stray cat, now	Aa, suman. Ore wa ima… muraneko wo koroshi ni ikuyo

Exhibit A: Nobuo Uematsu's signature (right), *Dragon Quest* producer Yuji Horii's signature (left), and, er, some Laughing Cow cheese.

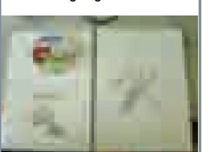
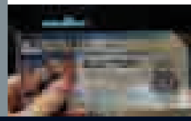


Exhibit B: A lottery ticket with the number 501 on it. Little did I know this slip of paper meant much foot pain.



MY FRIEND SAID. SO DOES JAPANESE RPGS TODAY?"

the bus stop, freezing cold in the rain, thinking about getting some ramen from the closest 7-Eleven and talking about the show. Sixteen minutes of rock, we'd witnessed. What was the point? We waited in line for four hours to listen to 16 minutes of music and die through two hours of bingo. All because… what? We love a game whose score composer has a fixation on blue plastic balls and the numbers three and seven?

"You've seen anime DVDs here," my friend commented. "Five thousand yen for one 30-minute episode. The Japanese are used to going through a lot for a little. There's always a hope that they'll get something in the end." When the end is that much longer than the beginning, though, what's the point of being rewarded? Does this explain the end-heavy nature and anticlimaxes of every Japanese RPG these days? "I don't know," my friend admitted. Then we went to the 7-Eleven and got frozen Choco Pies for ¥100 each, so that was good enough for me.

Kind regards



FINAL FANTASY – FOR WOMEN

Any Japanese guy will tell you that *Final Fantasy* has been 'for girls' since *Final Fantasy VI*, and ahead of me in line for the Black Mages concert stood a crowd of 14 girls, including a few better described as 'women'. An old woman and her granddaughter were looking at status menus in *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*. At one point, the grandmother looked over at my old Game Boy and invited me over.

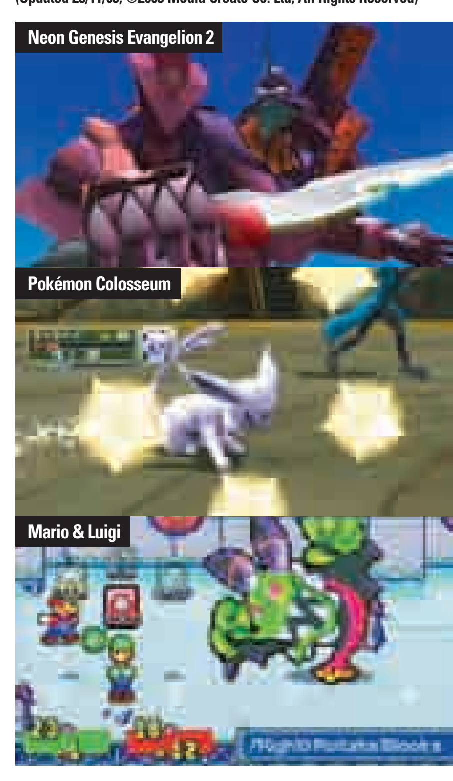
The granddaughter contended the best *Final Fantasy* game was the hardcore *V*, and talk quickly turned into a six-way discussion of which *Final Fantasy X-2* heroine is the cutest. The calm Yuna won easily, followed by the spunky Rikku, but no-one voted for the goth, Paine – "Not her! She's a bad girl!" a woman said.

The little girl showed me her cellphone ornaments – Rikku, Paine and Yuna. Then she let me hear her phone's 'Battle With Gilgamesh' tune. I asked about her menu background – Sora from *Kingdom Hearts 2*. "I thought you said *Kingdom Hearts* sucks?" I asked. She blushed. "Well, the art, I… I downloaded it because it was… new." Aha, I thought, that explains something. What, exactly, I can't be sure.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Neon Genesis Evangelion 2	Bandai	PS2
2	Pokémon Colosseum	Nintendo	GC
3	Mario And Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	GBA
4	Let's Make A Pro Baseball Team!	SEGA	PS2
5	Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	GC
6	Slime Morimori Dragon Quest: Shougeki No Shippo Dan	Square Enix	GBA
7	Taiko No Tatsujin: 3rd Generation	Namco	PS2
8	Siren	SCE	PS2
9	The Getaway	SCE	PS2
10	Xenosaga Episode 1 Reloaded: Der Wille Zur Macht	Namco	PS2

(Updated 23/11/03, ©2003 Media Create Co. Ltd, All Rights Reserved)



Neon Genesis Evangelion 2

Pokémon Colosseum

Mario & Luigi



WE'VE HEARD FAR TOO MANY COUNTRIES BRANDED 'THE NEW JAPAN' TO ACTUALLY BELIEVE A WORD OF IT, BUT DENMARK? DELVE BENEATH THE STEREOTYPES AND YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED AT THE GAMING DELIGHTS THAT NESTLE BETWEEN THE FJORDS. WAIT, THAT'S NORWAY, ISN'T IT? DAMN…



"WHEN 50 PER CENT OF RESPONSES ARE EXTREMELY NEGATIVE AND THE REST ARE EXTREMELY POSITIVE, YOU KNOW YOU'RE ON TO SOMETHING…"

JACOB ANDERSEN, IO INTERACTIVE

IO INTERACTIVE

JACOB ANDERSEN

It may not be the obvious place to go looking for up and coming development houses, but Scandanavia's gaming scene is a veritable treasure trove of little-known talent. While some of its members are still toiling away over the title that will make them a household name, others have already carved their names into the hearts, minds and collections of the industry. IO Interactive is one such firm and we tracked down one of the seven founding members, Jacob Andersen (lead games designer), to get his take on Nordic life, contract killings and all things IO.

"The company was founded by a group of developers that worked for the now-defunct American company Scavenger," explains Andersen, although Scavenger's liquidation after an ugly monetary dispute with GT Interactive may be one area the veterans would sooner forget. Interestingly, another company involved in this legal wrangling was also destined for bigger things – in the same way that Scavenger's demise paved the way for IO, Swedish developer Starbreeze Studio was born from the ashes of Triton. "Most of us were part of the late Eighties Amiga demo scene," Andersen recounts. "This led to employment in England and America where we developed games mainly for the SEGA Saturn – I guess we should have picked Sony instead of SEGA but it seemed like a good idea at the time." Hindsight aside, the likes of *Amok* and *Scorcher* were as good a route into the industry as any, and before the Nordic developers knew it, it was 1998 and what little remained of Scavenger had gone on to form IO Interactive.

After *Hitman: Codename 47* laid the groundwork for success upon its PC (or non-PC, depending on how you look at it) release, the team knew where the series had to go next. "When the PS2 arrived, there was no discussion – we wanted to make the sequel for that machine," says Andersen. And with this sequel garnering high praise across the board, IO had finally started to make a name for itself in what is a very fickle industry. As Andersen is keen to point out, this is especially difficult for developers of Nordic origin. "Where Denmark doesn't have an established game industry, it's really hard to find experienced staff locally, but after we released *Hitman 2* we started getting a lot of really good applications," he recalls, adding "I guess a company has to prove itself in the market in order to be able to attract the right talent."

But IO has seemingly always attracted the right talent, and over the course of its first five years the company's payroll has soared from seven to over 130 employees. Its recruitment policy is an area of interest and something that Andersen is keen to explain. "We have a policy of only hiring people that are better at what they do than ourselves," he says, and while we're still trying to get our heads around this concept, he tries to explain it further. "This way the standard is kept high and we get a lot of very dedicated people in the company." It might sound strange but there can be little dispute as to whether or not it works – as IO continues to go from strength to strength and build its portfolio with the likes of *Freedom Fighters*, industry figures are being forced to sit up and take notice of the increasingly important Danish firm and its consistently good games.

So how did IO cope with the publishing change from Eidos to Electronic Arts and back again? "We have always had a policy of trying to get really close to the publisher we're working with," says Andersen. "This is really important for IO because we want to have creative influence on marketing and such." Although from the sound of things, EA's size was something of a culture shock. "The bigger a publisher's organisation gets, the harder we have to work to get to the right people."

Still, there's a lot to be said for having a high-profile franchise to your name, and where the biggest players in publishing may have shunned IO a few years ago, the situation is a very different one today. "It's now a lot easier to get ideas across to the publishers and they're more willing to bet on our projects than they were in the beginning," Andersen says, and with a big-money name like *Hitman* behind it and the likes of *Freedom Fighters* to prove that it's no one-trick pony, the only way is up for IO Interactive…

Hitman: Contracts is due out for PlayStation2, Xbox and PC in April '04 and is previewed on page 42.

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, games™ GOES BEHIND THE SCENES WITH A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH, SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT THREW OPEN ITS DOORS AND LET US IN…



SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

SOME PEOPLE THINK IT'S THE FUTURE, BUT ONLINE GAMING ALREADY HAS A PAST. AND SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT STANDS OUT AS A COMPANY THAT'S MAKING HISTORY WITH ITS MANY VIRTUAL WORLDS.

The stereotype of the pasty-faced gamer – squinty eyes and bleached white skin from too little sunlight – may be comical, but it could well turn out to be the norm in future if Sony Online Entertainment (SOE) gets its way. After producing niche titles such as *Jeopardy Online* and *Wheel Of Fortune Online* in its early days, the company hit paydirt when it came up with the concept for *EverQuest*, a massively multiplayer online RPG that allowed you to live another life online and go from being Joe Public to a dragon-slaying hero overnight (albeit at the expense of your real life). The success of the *EverQuest* (or *EQ*) world has served the company well and spawned numerous opportunities, from spin-offs of the *EverQuest* world to totally new titles like *PlanetSide* and even the privilege of developing *Star Wars Galaxies* for LucasArts. However, taking that first step into the unknown with an (at the time) unproven genre must have been pretty nerve-wracking – not least for the people who'd put in all that hard work on the game… "No-one had an idea when *EverQuest* first came about how big it was going to end up," says John Blakely, senior producer on *EverQuest II*. "The whole focus was 'Are we still going to be here in a month?' back when it was being shipped, because at that time it was basically a case of getting a certain number of subscribers or everyone losing their jobs. There was no plan or any inclination that *EQ* was going to become as big as it has done. We're very excited by that and have been able to embrace the success to help it grow into what it's become, but I don't think anybody could have predicted it, because success on that level happens very infrequently – not just in the games industry, but in any business."



Based in San Diego, California, Sony Online Entertainment is the online gaming branch of Sony Pictures Digital Entertainment.

Not surprisingly, the members of *EverQuest*'s design department have rather unique ideas as far as interior decorating goes – still, all work and no play makes for a dull game…

The extent of SOE's experience with online gaming has allowed it to create some hugely popular titles such as *EverQuest* and, more recently, *Star Wars Galaxies*.

Of course, the reason for *EverQuest*'s huge uptake and subsequent success could be put down to the fact that it managed to capture the imaginations of so many people. At a time when PC online gaming was mostly restricted to player-vs-player confrontation titles, the idea of a fully-fledged world where people could work together to achieve their goals was a breath of fresh air. With six expansion packs expanding the realm of Norrath even further since the game's initial release, it's clear that players can't get enough of it, even after nearly five years. "These games are almost more like toys than they are games," says Chris Cao, lead content designer on *EverQuest II*. "With a lot of other games, you have a strict set of rules that create the interactions and so players have fun within a fairly small context; *EverQuest* goes completely the other way by offering an immense amount of freedom. While we're limiting the context more with *EverQuest II*, it's for the simple reason of balance. *EverQuest* proved that if you apply enough force to anything, you can accomplish anything; with *EverQuest II*, we want to make applying that force a skill or a fun activity. You have to be much more careful when attempting an encounter, and the way you do it will probably bring about much more interesting stories, because more interesting things will happen in that environment."

No doubt this is something that may frustrate current players of *EverQuest*, simply because of the way the world of the game has evolved. Through players combining forces above and beyond what was initially intended by SOE and forming guilds that act almost like huge mobile armies (something that Blakely himself admits is "very impressive behaviour"), much of the skill in being an individual has been lost. Not surprisingly, the sense of being relevant and having your personal skills appreciated and relied upon within your party is something that SOE is intent on bringing back with *EverQuest II*; not just because it will enhance the gameplay, but because it opens the game back up for both new players and those who've tired of the current guild-based direction the original game has taken.

"Our target market is those players that have come through the *EQ* franchise and have left to go onto different things," admits Blakely. "Obviously, we have a base of players that are still very happy playing *EQ* and it's one of the largest player bases in the world; however, we also want to reintroduce older players by appealing to them and also bring in a whole new crop of players too." If it's new players that SOE wants, then it need look no further than the console market; with the PS2's *EverQuest Online Adventures* now available over here and already a relative success in the US, console gamers are warming to the idea of working together in a massively multiplayer environment rather than blowing each other to bits. That said, there's no doubt that the online console gaming nut is proving a

"THE BENEFIT OF ONLINE IS THAT YOU NEVER KNOW HOW THE GAME IS GOING TO TURN OUT"
ROB HILL

BIG UP THE ONLINE MASSIVE

Despite efforts to expand the *EverQuest* franchise into new areas, SOE's focus is still on its online titles; with several under its belt, it's not surprising that the company is one of the leading developers in its field.

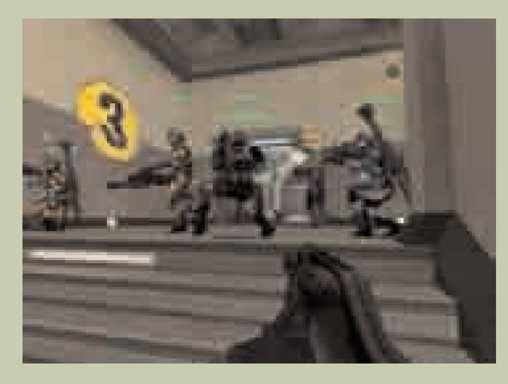
EVERQUEST PC [1999]

The title that put SOE where it is today and the one that's still going strong, even after five years. The unique co-op gameplay has spawned online communities, growing far beyond SOE's expectations, with a minimum of 60,000 people online at any one time.



PLANETSIDE PC [2003]

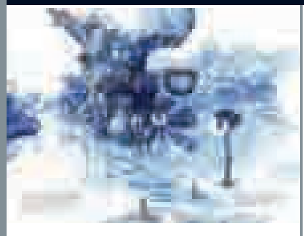
PlanetSide took the idea of having multiple people in the player-vs-player environment that all online FPS titles have and applied it to the massively multiplayer genre. The result? The first MMOFPS title, with an ever-evolving world and thousands of people to blow away.



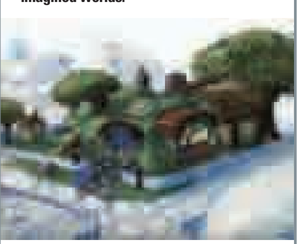
STAR WARS GALAXIES PC [2003]

Having built up expectations from *Star Wars* fans the world over, the first title in the *Galaxies* series might have disappointed some. But that hasn't stopped thousands of gamers buying into the idea of living in the *Star Wars* universe. This one will run and run…

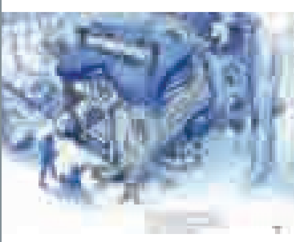




Concept art brings life to imagined worlds.



Planning an online title is detailed work.



The amount of painstaking design work that goes into creating the environments, even the smallest elements, is impressive.

"IN A LOT OF WAYS, EVERQUEST II DOES WHAT EVERQUEST CAN'T DO NOW, WHICH IS RE-INVENT ITSELF AND OFFER A NEW EXPERIENCE"
CHRIS CAO



MMORPG MEN

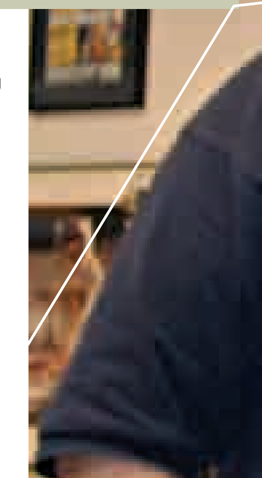
1 Chris Cao, Game Designer, SOE
In A Nutshell: In charge of content design on *EverQuest II*, although he also worked on elements of the original *EverQuest* (*EQ Live* and the expansions).

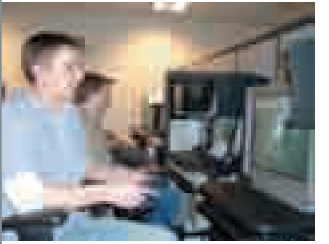
2 John Blakely, Senior Producer, SOE
In A Nutshell: Has worked exclusively on *EverQuest II* during his time at SOE. Previously played a key role at VR-1 in Colorado on several titles from *Fighter Ace III* through to *Nightcaster*.

Not Pictured – Rob Hill, Producer, SOE
In A Nutshell: Deals with developers outside SOE. Previously worked on SOE titles such as *Infantry Online* and the Pocket PC version of *EverQuest*.

LONG TIME RUNNING

Even though many thousands of people still log onto the *EverQuest* servers on a daily basis, the original title's fast-approaching fifth birthday only emphasises the fact that the game is looking slightly old. Technology moves so quickly, it's difficult for a long-running title to keep up-to-date; however, it's an something for which SOE is readying itself when it comes to the sequel. "The original *EverQuest* was designed with a certain longevity in mind," admits John Blakely, "and we've exceeded that by a long way. With *EverQuest II*, we're already planning for the technology, the visuals and the underlying engine of the game, both on the back-end server side and the front-end client side, to be able to grow as technology grows. So we're planning on it being around for a long while."

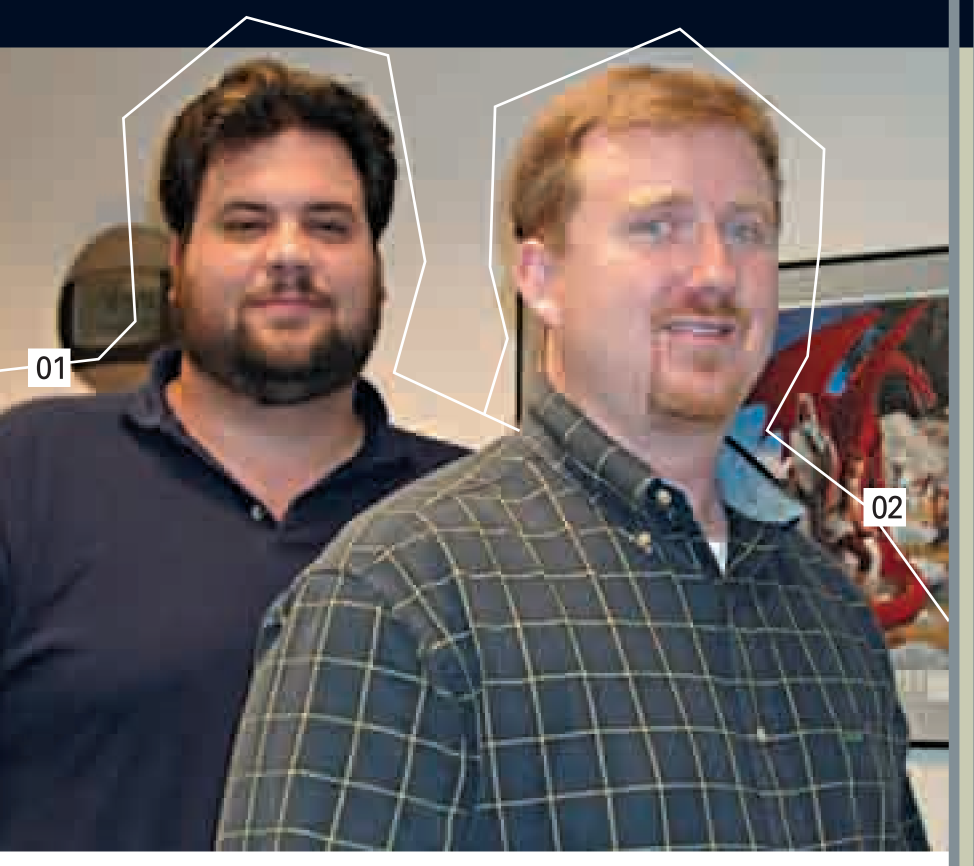


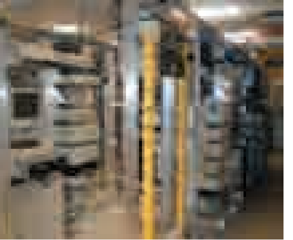




tough one to crack, particularly in the UK; and with so many online titles queuing up for console conversions, it's something that SOE is already working hard to improve upon."The whole online concept is new to consoles," says Rob Hill, producer of *Champions Of Norrath*, the second title for the PS2 set in the *EverQuest* world. "I think bringing the gamers in is going to be the key thing and hopefully experiences like *Champions Of Norrath*, where it's quick and action-orientated, will help it along. However, I think it's starting to take quite an effort to bring them in in the first place, possibly because there's a stigma on consoles towards the single-player experience. The benefit of online, though, is that you never know how the game is going to turn out. In single-player, we do as much as we can with randomness and AI, but you never really know how an actual person is going to react, so it does bring an entirely unique experience. It will catch on – it's just going to take time."

As a man with a great deal of experience in developing for the PC, Blakely believes that the console market's late arrival at the online party is not because manufacturers have been caught napping. "What makes a console successful is the amount of control that's levied by the company behind it," he says. "There are no differences in the hardware across the board, the software is all controlled through approval processes and so on, so that's what's made it the quality of entertainment that it is today. Introducing networking, which is effectively a





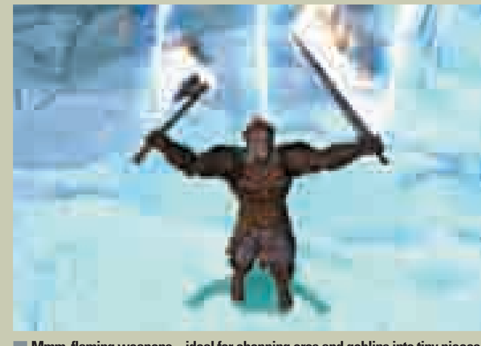


form of chaos, into that whole order is difficult, and I think consoles are starting to go online as late as they are because companies have been figuring out ways to provide some control to that chaos. The PC market is all about that chaos and being able to have a set-up that's totally unique, which is probably why it was the pioneer. It's a natural progression, though, and, generally, you see a lot of pioneering done in the PC market in terms of technology and then get the application done very well in a controlled manner through consoles."

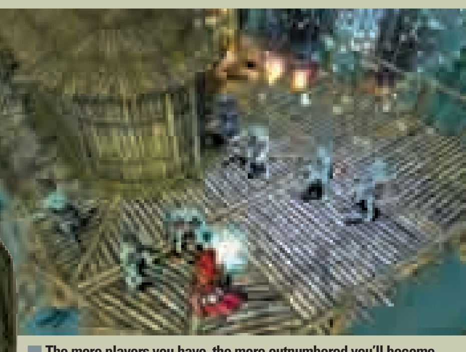
While the company's future direction might seem obvious (considering its name includes the word 'online'), you have to wonder whether focusing on one core concept such as online gaming – and in particular, online console gaming – is something that will remain constant as SOE continues to grow. Despite expansions into other areas like RTS and more action-based titles, though, the company's roots look set to remain grounded in what it's good at for the time being. "I think you can see from our current projects like *PlanetSide*, *Champions Of Norrath* and *Star Wars: Galaxies* that we're always trying to push into new areas that haven't been done before and, obviously, online is the newest thing," says Hill. "The type of people that we are, we're all online game players and that's kind of what we all really enjoy, so that's probably what our focus is going to be, at least in the mid-term."

AIN'T IT COOL?

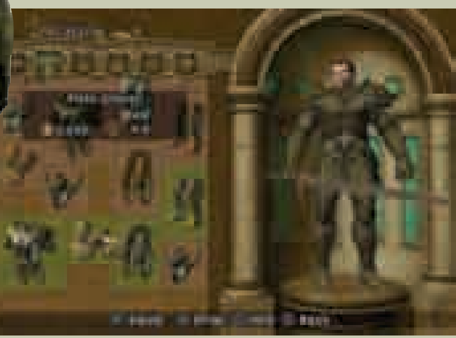
The good thing about developing online PC games is that you can always add to them at a later date, both through the release of add-on packs (something that *EverQuest* has seen many of in its time) or by simply updating the servers and improving various elements in a way that most people won't even notice. Move into PS2 gaming, though, and that's no longer the case, as you're restricted by the console. It's an issue that the development team on *Champions Of Norrath* has had to worry about on a regular basis, simply because there are always new and exciting elements coming up that would be great if there was time to include them in the finished product. "As well as having to try and keep up with technology," admits Hill, "you're always fighting with the 'wouldn't that be cool?' factor when developing games like this. People see things that work and wonder if it'd be good in our game as well, but you have to consider that you might not have the time. There are always things you'll want to include, but you have to say 'That's it' and make what you've got as good as you can instead."



Mmm, flaming weapons – ideal for chopping orcs and goblins into tiny pieces.



The more players you have, the more outnumbered you'll become.



Armour and weapons are character-specific, so it's vital to grab the right stuff.

RELEASE LISTS



Castlevania PS2
Is Konami's latest game just *Devil May Cry* with a whip?

Ollie King Arcade
More cel-shaded mayhem from SEGA.

Spy Vs Spy Multi
Those lovable spies finally enter the 128-bit era.

Rogue Ops Multi
It's *Splinter Cell* with a girl, isn't it?

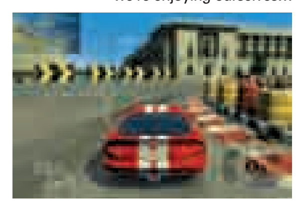


MOST PLAYED

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft

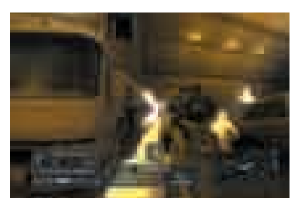
Every job has its perks and the chance to play Bizarre Creations' excellent new racer a month before its release date was not to be sniffed at. Despite our rather sneaky head start, everyone else we play against is still regularly beating us. Still, at least we're enjoying ourselves…



RAINBOW SIX 3

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Ubisoft

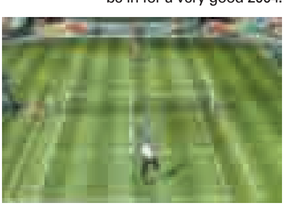
Well, it's pretty obvious that we're into Xbox Live in a big way. Ubisoft's latest squad-based shooter is superb online and is the perfect way to relax after a day in the office. We know it's supposed to be stealthy, but there's something about letting loose with a grenade launcher that makes us smile…

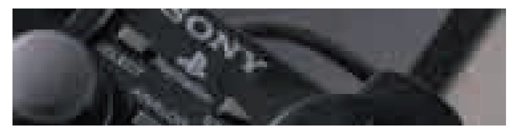


TOP SPIN

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft

A friendly game of tennis is the perfect way to finish off a hectic Live evening. Playing online works better than we could have ever expected and we'll soon be participating in our first online league. Christmas has been a great showcase for Xbox Live, and if Microsoft continues to be on the ball we could be in for a very good 2004.





PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
JANUARY '04			
09 January	Destruction Derby Arenas	SCEE	
16 January	Conan	TDK	
16 January	Mafia	Take 2	
30 January	Arc: Twilight Of The Spirits	SCEE	
30 January	Flipnic	Ubisoft	
30 January	NFL Street	EA	
TBC	The X-Files: Resist Or Serve	Vivendi	
TBC	Dynasty Warriors 4: Xtreme Legends	THQ	
FEBRUARY '04			
06 February	Legacy of Kain: Defiance	Eidos	Wanted
06 February	R-Type Final	Metro 3D	
06 February	Rogue Ops	Capcom	
06 February	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	
13 February	Whiplash	Eidos	
20 February	Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel	Vivendi	
27 February	Kya: Dark Lineage	Atari	
27 February	Headhunter: Redemption	SEGA	
TBC	Bad Boys II	Interactive	
TBC	Megaman X-7	Capcom	
TBC	Final Fantasy X-2	SCEE	Wanted
TBC	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	Atari	
TBC	Alias	Acclaim	
TBC	Spy Hunter 2	Midway	
TBC	Outlaw Volleyball	TDK	
TBC	Sphinx And The Cursed Mummy	THQ	
TBC	Cy Girls	Konami	
TBC	Breath Of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	
TBC	Terminator 3: Rise Of The Machines	Atari	
TBC	Starcraft: Ghost	Vivendi	
TBC	Richard Burns Rally	SCi	
MARCH '04			
26 March	Iron Storm	Wanadoo	
TBC	Gran Turismo 4	SCEE	Wanted
TBC	Driver 3	Atari	
TBC	This Is Football 2004	SCEE	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Tak And The Power Of Juju	THQ	
Q1 '04			
TBC	The Getaway 2	SCEE	
TBC	kill.switch	EA	
TBC	Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	Ubisoft	
TBC	R: Racing Evolution	Namco	
TBC	Megaman Anniversary Collection	Capcom	
TBC	Gradius V	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Sniper Elite	Wanadoo	
TBC	Karaoke Stage	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Sing	SCEE	
TBC	EyeToy: Sports	SCEE	

GAMECUBE

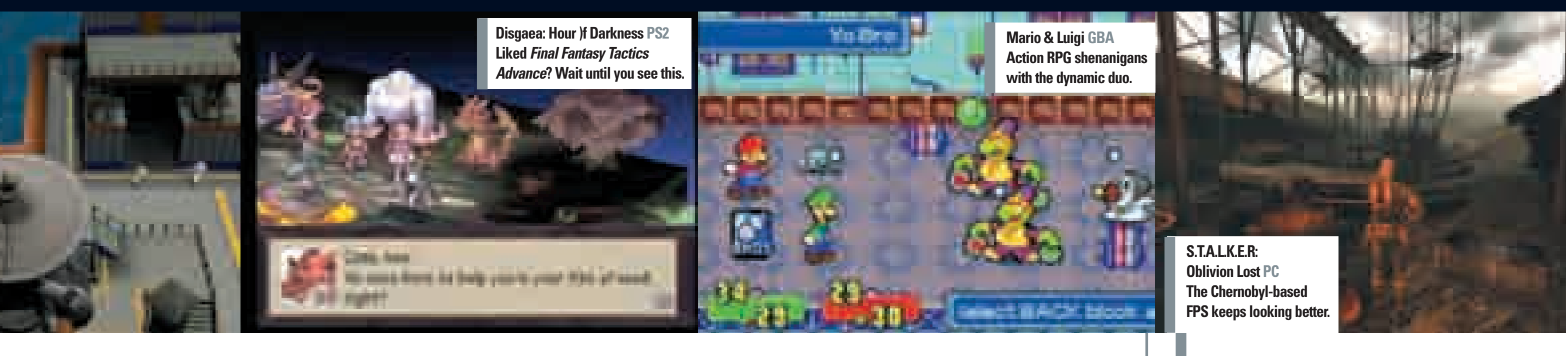
Month	Title	Publisher	
FEBRUARY '04			
06 February	Conan	TDK	
06 February	Conflict: Desert Storm II	SCi	
06 February	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	
TBC	Phantasy Star Online Episode III: C.A.R.D. Revolution	SEGA	
TBC	XGRA	Acclaim	
TBC	Sphinx And The Cursed Mummy	THQ	
MARCH '04			
TBC	007 James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	EA	
TBC	Tak And The Power Of Juju	THQ	
Q1'04			
TBC	Kirby Air Ride	Nintendo	
TBC	R: Racing Evolution	Namco	
TBC	Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Wario Ware	Nintendo	
TBC	Geist	Nintendo	
TBC	Bad Boys II	Empire	
TBC	Starcraft Ghost	Vivendi	
TBC	Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Pokémon Box	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Channel	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Colosseum	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Mario Tennis	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Paper Mario	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Spy Hunter 2	Midway	
TBC	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Pikmin 2	Nintendo	
TBC	Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	Konami	
TBC	Nintendo Puzzle Collection	Nintendo	
TBC	Harvest Moon: It's A Wonderful Life	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Wanted



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher
JANUARY '04		
16 January	Mafia	Take 2
30 January	NFL Street	EA
30 January	Dragon's Lair 3D	THQ

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES


Disgaea: Hour)f Darkness PS2 Liked *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*? Wait until you see this.

Mario & Luigi GBA Action RPG shenanigans with the dynamic duo.

S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Oblivion Lost PC The Chernobyl-based FPS keeps looking better.

TBC	Conan	TDK	
FEBRUARY '04			
06 February	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	
06 February	Unreal II: The Awakening	Atari	
13 February	Whiplash	Eidos	
20 February	Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel	Vivendi	
20 February	007 James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	EA	
TBC	Alias	Acclaim	
TBC	Legacy Of Kain: Defiance	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	SEGA GT Online	SEGA	
TBC	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	Acclaim	
TBC	Headhunter: Redemption	SEGA	
MARCH '04			
05 March	BC	Microsoft	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	
TBC	Driver 3	Atari	
Q1'04			
TBC	Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Halo 2	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Dancing Stage Unleashed	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Armed & Dangerous	Activision	
TBC	Dead Man's Hand	Atari	
TBC	Templar: Knights Of The Temple	TDK	
TBC	Dead Or Alive: Chronos	Microsoft	
TBC	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami	
TBC	Rogue Ops	Capcom	
TBC	Bad Boys II	Interactive	
TBC	Starcraft: Ghost	Vivendi	
TBC	Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	
TBC	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	
TBC	Fable	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Team SAS	Vivendi	
TBC	True Fantasy Live Online	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Kameo: Elements Of Power	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Sudeki	Microsoft	
TBC	Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	Ghouls 'N Ghosts Online	Capcom	
TBC	Dead Or Alive Online	Microsoft	



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
JANUARY '04			
30 January	Sim City 4 Deluxe	EA	
TBC	Conan	TDK	
TBC	EverQuest II	Ubisoft	
FEBRUARY '04			
06 February	X²: The Threat	Koch	
06 February	Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Wanted
20 February	Neighbours From Hell 2	Bigben	
27 February	Horizons: Empire Of Istaria	Atari	
TBC	Alias	Acclaim	
TBC	Soldner: Secret Of Wars	JoWood	
TBC	The Sims 2	EA	Wanted
Q1'04			
TBC	Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	
TBC	Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Wanted
TBC	Vampire The Masquerade: Bloodlines	Activision	
TBC	Doom III	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault	EA	
TBC	Warhammer Online	SEGA	
TBC	Fire Warrior	THQ	
TBC	Armed & Dangerous	Activision	
TBC	Pain Killer	DreamCatcher	
TBC	Evil Genius	Vivendi	
TBC	Sid Meier's Pirates	Atari	
TBC	Thief 3	Eidos	
TBC	Richard Burns Rally	SCI	
TBC	Sam And Max: Freelance Police	Activision	
TBC	Trinity	Activision	
TBC	Black & White 2	Microsoft	
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Oblivion Lost	THQ	
TBC	Sniper Elite	Wanadoo	
TBC	Driver 3	Atari	



GBA

Month	Title	Publisher	
JANUARY '04			
06 January	Need For Speed Underground	EA	
FEBRUARY '04			
TBC	Sphinx And The Cursed Mummy	THQ	
Q1'04			
TBC	Tak And The Power Of JuJu	THQ	
TBC	Fire Emblem	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Pokémon Leaf Green/Fire Red	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Hamtaro: Rainbow Rescue	Nintendo	
TBC	Mortal Kombat Tournament	Midway	
TBC	Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Mr Driller	Nintendo	
TBC	Jet Set Radio	SEGA	
TBC	Sword Of Mana	Nintendo	
TBC	Sonic Battle	SEGA	
TBC	Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Nintendo	Wanted

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. It's not our fault. We tried ever so hard…

games™ ON THE HORIZON

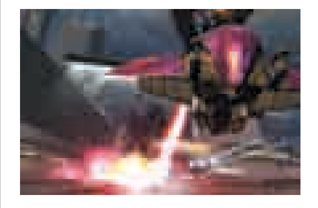
OUT RUN 2
Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SEGA
Now that SEGA's sequel to its amazing 1986 racer has been released, speculation about a console version is reaching fever pitch. It may have been designed on the Xbox-friendly Chihiro board, but it's looking more likely that the game will be appearing on the PlayStation2. Just a vicious rumour? Watch this space…



FINAL FANTASY XII
Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Square Enix
It seems to have taken forever, but Square Enix has finally released details of its next *Final Fantasy* game. A new look for the series would have been nice, but the prospect of continuing our adventures in Ivalice (home of *Final Fantasy Tactics*) is very exciting. And with *X-2* out in the UK in 2004, RPG fans should be pleased.



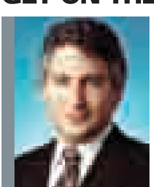
HALO 2
Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft
Yes, yes, we know that we've mentioned this on numerous occasions, but with its release mere months away can you really blame us? Some may say that Bungie's monumental task of topping *Halo* is impossible, but if this turns out to be half as good online as Microsoft is promising, we're going to be happy bunnies indeed. April simply cannot come soon enough.





THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

GET ON UP, GET ON THE SCENE



If there's one thing I'm aware of, as a gamer and as a parent, it's the addictive nature of videogames. It didn't take long for my daughters (aged eight and five) to determine that while educational titles on the PC were interesting, playing PS2 games was much more fun.

Pretty quickly, I detected that my kids' interest in when I'd get home was motivated less by their abiding love than by their desire to play games with Dad….

My wife, though, wasn't exactly sanguine about this, and even this gaming industry vet was filled with nagging doubts. Is sitting on their duffs and twiddling their thumbs really a healthy pursuit for our youth? I mean, look around you – so many kids these days are unhealthily large.

Videogames aren't the cause of this problem – diet and lack of exercise are. But, unlike other entertainment providers, the games industry can start to change the inverse relationship between entertainment consumption and fitness.

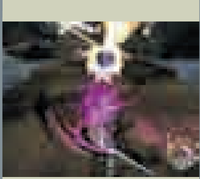
Enter EyeToy. Kudos to SCEE and Logitech for this one. For the first time, here's a videogame my wife supports. It's truly a pleasure to see my kids jumping, lunging and working up a healthy sweat with the EyeToy, instead of just building strong thumbs. While EyeToy isn't the first physical game, it's the first which is accessible and fun for everyone. It shows the potential for a new type of entertainment – entertainment that is good not just for the soul, but for the body too.

My challenge to the games industry is let's do more of this. New interface technologies give developers the power to create new types of products that can change the way we interact with our entertainment. It's time to put the 'active' back in interactive entertainment.

Jonathan Epstein is president of GameSpy Industries, a leader in online media and technology for gamers and publishers.

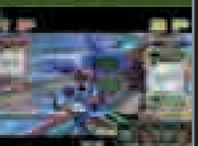
FROM THE FRONT

SEGA AND CAPCOM COUNT THE CASH WHILE SONY REVEALS FUTURISTIC PLAYSTATION3 TECHNOLOGY



Otogi: Myth Of Demons did well in 2003…





Will *Phantasy Star Online 3* succeed in 2004?

THE QUARTERLY ROUND-UP

WE ASSESS THE WINNERS AND LOSERS IN THE INDUSTRY

The champagne must have been flowing this Christmas for several publishers as they announced healthy sales for the first half of 2003's fiscal year. Surprisingly, it's the likes of SEGA and Capcom which have been amongst the success stories, though Konami, Namco and Tecmo have shared their good fortune. You may remember that we have reported Capcom's financial difficulties over the last year, but it seems things have picked up.

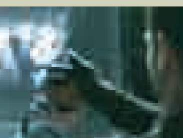
"We didn't release many home console games during the first half of the year, but that was our plan," revealed Capcom's executive vice president, Heiji Oshima. "It has to do with the restructuring of our development divisions in the first half." Capcom's profit for the six-month period was ¥919 million (nearly £5 million), compare this to last year's loss of ¥22.5 billion (£121 million) and it's little wonder that Capcom is pleased.

Namco has also had impressive results, largely due to the impressive sales of *Soul Calibur II*, with profits up 180 per cent from last year. Despite an actual loss in its console division, SEGA was still ahead of its original forecast and considerable interest in its Arcade division has no doubt accelerated its current change in fortunes. Indeed, this has so far been SEGA's most profitable year since it stopped producing hardware.

Unfortunately, there is always the odd casualty – step forward Acclaim. With a recent output that has revealed a number of turkeys, Acclaim is rapidly becoming a shadow of its former self. Recent results reveal a £2.5 million loss for the company –



Phil Harrison has seen the future. Will you join him?



Sometimes truth is just as strange as fiction…

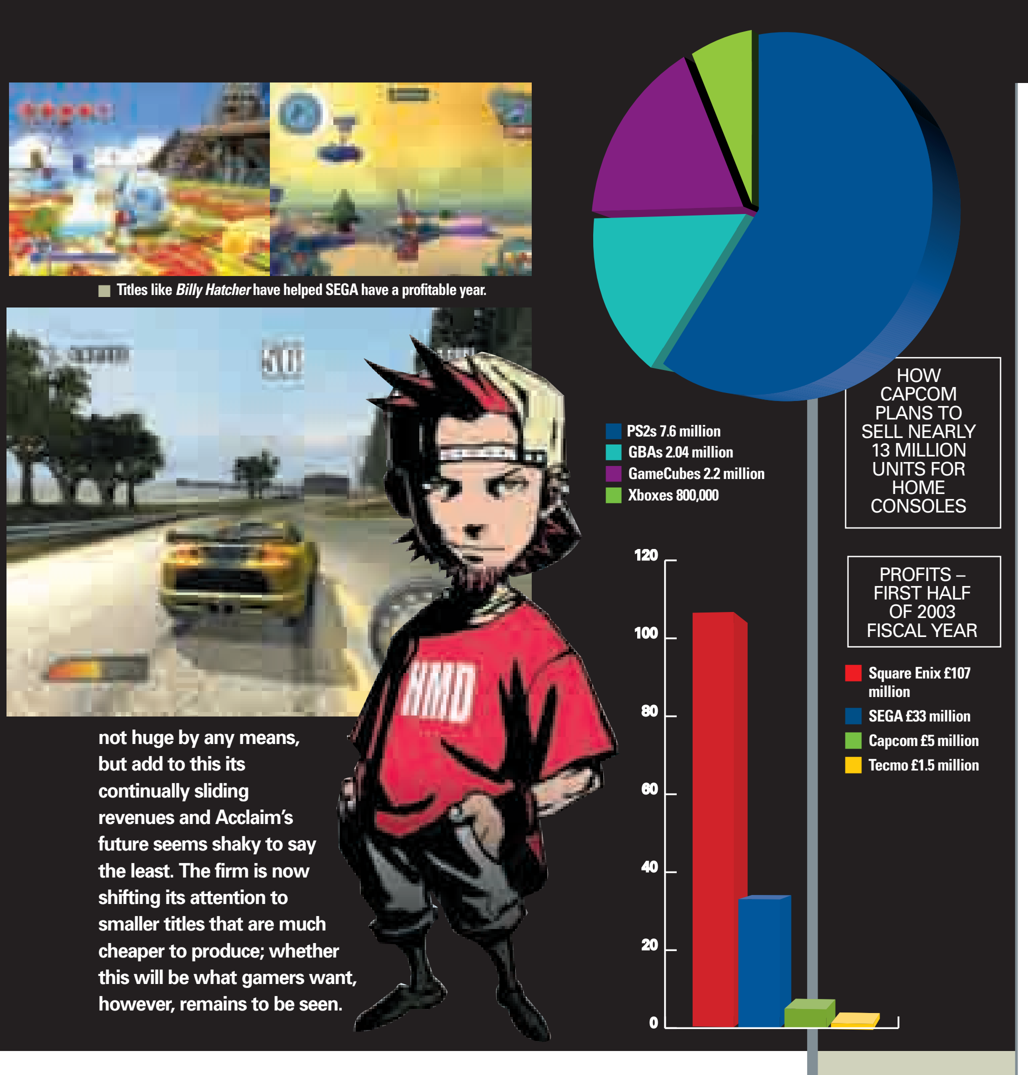
SONY REVEALS ITS NEW MINORITY-REPORT TECHNOLOGY

THE PS3 HYPE STARTS HERE

Now that every gamer and his dog are fully aware of the PSP and PSX, Sony is once again turning its attention to the PS3. A recent interview with *Australian Financial Review* suggests that Ken 'PS2 is like plugging into the Matrix' Kutaragi, CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment, has been watching too many films again. In the interview, SCEE president Phil Harrison was eager to explain that Sony's next console would feature vastly improved built-in EyeToy technology, and also suggested that the hugely successful peripheral has been merely a test run for this integrated system.

"EyeToy was a signpost for things in the future," revealed Harrison. "If you can attach very high-resolution, low-cost video cameras [to consoles] you can deduce some quite interesting things about their users. We'll be able to extrapolate eye movement and gestural recognition, more complicated finger movement, and the logical next step of that is to deduce from a person's facial expression and demeanour what their emotion state is." Sounds like the Emotion Engine to us, and, let's face it, we're still looking for proof of its abilities on the PlayStation2.

Of course, the most spectacular claim is that it's possible the PS3 will feature a hand-driven menu system, which would use a similar operation system to the hologram screens featured in the film *Minority Report*. Obviously, nothing has been confirmed at such an early stage, but it's interesting to see the direction Sony is currently considering. Whether any of this becomes reality remains to be seen, but the next-generation hype machine has started working in earnest.



Titles like *Billy Hatcher* have helped SEGA have a profitable year.

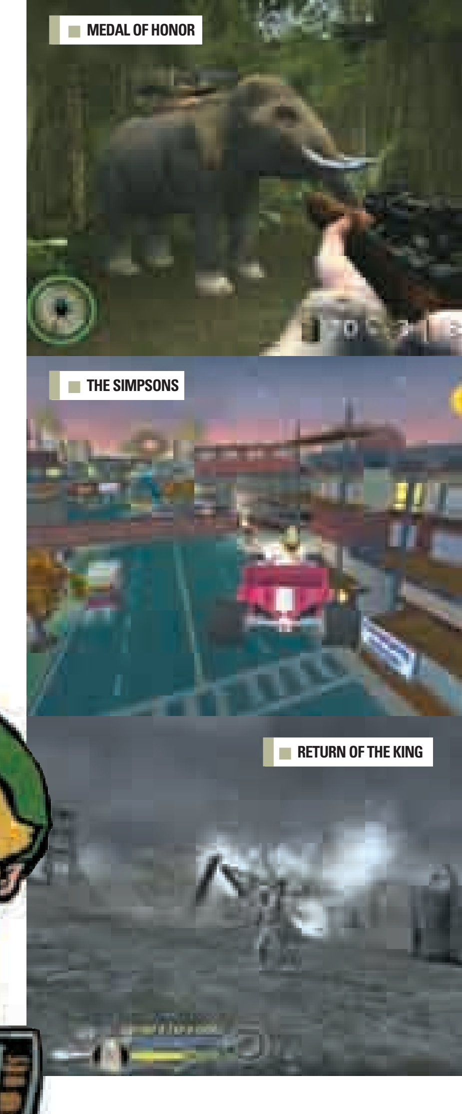
not huge by any means, but add to this its continually sliding revenues and Acclaim's future seems shaky to say the least. The firm is now shifting its attention to smaller titles that are much cheaper to produce; whether this will be what gamers want, however, remains to be seen.

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	EA Games	Multi
2	FIFA 2004	EA Sports	Multi
3	Need For Speed: Underground	EA Games	Multi
4	LOTR: Return Of The King	EA Games	Multi
5	The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi	Multi
6	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Multi
7	True Crime: Streets of L.A.	Activision	Multi
8	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	EA Games	Multi
9	EyeToy: Play	SCEE	PS2
10	Finding Nemo	THQ	Multi

Another Christmas, another Electronic Arts onslaught. It's multiformat titles all the way at the moment with only Sony's unstoppable EyeToy proving to be the only console-specific product that's managed to re-enter the charts.

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of ELSPA (UK) Ltd. UK Full Price Sales Charts (All Formats) (w/e Sat 6 December, 2003)



NINTENDO'S GOOD TIDINGS

NINTENDO PULLS OUT ALL THE STOPS TO ENSURE A GREAT END TO THE YEAR

Thanks to the GameCube's price cut, the machine saw a huge improvement in sales in the run-up to Christmas. Sales drastically increased worldwide and Nintendo is now claiming that its machine has outsold the Xbox in many regions. The $99 price tag in the US has proved extremely popular; in October alone, over a quarter of a million Cubes were sold – a massive 50 per cent improvement over every previous month in 2003. The price cut enabled Nintendo to grab a lucrative 35 per cent of the US market (compared to the Xbox's 24 per cent and the PS2's 41 per cent in the same period).

Nintendo's good fortune has continued in Japan and Europe with a sales increase of 145 per cent when *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* was released in Japan. After the price cut in the UK, the GameCube's market share increased from five to 25 per cent, and it continues to do well.

"GameCube is now selling at the fastest rate since its launch," said David Gosen, managing director of Nintendo Europe. "This proves that at the right price and with the great software line-up, it really is the console of choice."

The *Zelda* bonus disc has also boosted sales.

Zelda is now in more homes thanks to Cube sales.



Taking violence to the streets… **Shockway Rider Amstrad CPC464 [Faster Than Light] 1986**


PEOPLE
POWER
ZONE15
5
1030
00:19

HITMAN: CONTRACTS



Watch out for those 'innocent' bystanders – they've got cleavers.

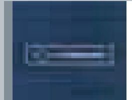
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THIS... IS FROM... MATILDA

HITMAN + HITMAN 2 x MAJOR CLIFFHANGER = HITMAN: CONTRACTS

"CONTRACTS WILL REVEAL A NEW SIDE TO HITMAN. THE GAME WILL BE EPIC, HIGHLY DISTURBING AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, AN ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE"

JANOS FLÖSSER, MD, IO INTERACTIVE



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Formed as a joint venture between Nordisk Film & TV AS and game developer Reto-Moto, IO Interactive is now one of the leading developers in Denmark. Since 1998, it has grown from employing under ten people to well over a hundred across various departments.

HISTORY

- **FREEDOM FIGHTERS** 2003 [Multi]
- **HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN** 2002 [Multi]
- **HITMAN: CODENAME 47** 2000 [PC]



You're obviously allowed to kill the girl, but it won't look too good on your record.

THE HITMAN'S BACK WITHOUT EVEN A HINT OF MICHAELA STRACHAN

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, PC
ORIGIN: Denmark
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: IO Interactive
RELEASE: April '04
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Agent 47 continues to put himself in dangerous situations as the *Hitman* series comes to a serious head. Can he survive long enough to find out the truth?

Not that we're in the most educated position to comment on the life of an assassin, seeing as our knowledge of the subject comes from movies starring Jean Reno, Bridget Fonda and (heaven help us) Sylvester Stallone, but we're guessing that the lot of a professional killer is not a happy one. Sure, so the money might be good and the job certainly has an air of coolness about it, but we doubt that the repeated chances of getting a cap popped in your ass (as it were) are hardly offset by the benefits. Much as we try not to, then, we find ourselves feeling sorry for Agent 47, if only because he's once again between a rock and a hard place as far as dangerous situations go. Oh, and he's been shot. Could this be the end for everyone's favourite hitman? Cue the *EastEnders*-style music…

Opening on possibly the most depressing point of the *Hitman* series yet, the story of *Hitman: Contracts* is markedly different when compared to the last two games. This is mostly because while it advances the saga more slowly than previously, it also tries to take the plot in a far more progressive direction to guarantee the series more life, rather than just having you proceed from one job to the next with no real purpose. Starting off in an apartment in the heart of Paris, things are looking bleak for 47 – following a botched job that has left him badly wounded, he manages to escape and make it back to safety, only to pass out from his injuries.

It's then, by 47's life flashing before his eyes, that we get to the real meat of the game, with players getting to relive some of 47's past jobs (a total of 12 new missions, before you start worrying about rehashed material from the previous games) and seeing exactly what a nightmare the life of a hired assassin really is. As things progress you'll come more up to date and eventually the circumstances surrounding the botched job – not to mention 47's subsequent shooting – come to light, with more than a few surprises in store. Saying more would obviously spoil the surprise, but suffice to say that everything goes pear-shaped and it turns out that the end is merely the beginning… if that makes any sense.

Of course, it's not just the plot that's been revamped for this latest example of IO Interactive's creative abilities – there's also the matter of the game itself. While it's true that the amount of time allowed for the development of *Contracts* has been somewhat short, that hasn't prevented the talent at IO from taking the already solid *Hitman 2* game engine and making it even better. The result is an enhanced graphical engine that helps bring locales such as Rotterdam, Paris and Romania to life more vividly than before, while the controls have been suitably tightened to allow more precise control over 47's actions. This decision to improve rather than rebuild from scratch allows fans of the previous games to get back into the action without much delay, while offering something better that will hopefully draw in a new audience as well.

Naturally, in this case the proof of the pudding is most definitely in the shooting, and while what we've seen so far is certainly an impressive base from which to start, IO is going to have its work cut out if it wants to hit Eidos' planned April release. That said, the Danish developer hasn't let us down yet, and with *Hitman: Contracts* looking as good as it does right now, we don't think this game will disappoint either.

"USING AGENT 47'S MEMORIES, THIS SHOULD BE THE MOST INTRIGUING EPISODE OF THE HITMAN SERIES"

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Conventional weapons are limited in terms of availability and use in the *Hitman* games, meaning Agent 47 has to make the most of what he finds. Thankfully, there's now a wealth of new items with which you can dish out some pain. Pool cues can be used in a number of 'creative' ways, pillows help with suffocation, and meathooks not only offer plenty of opportunity for evisceration, but can be used to hang up bodies to hide them. Creativity – it's the future of professional assassination.

FAR CRY

EVEN THE PREDATOR WOULD BE HARD PUSHED TO KILL THIS LOT…

DETAILS
FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Germany
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Crytek
RELEASE: Feb '04
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1 (1-16 Online)

A first-person shooter set on a tropical island, featuring advanced artificial intelligence and new stealth gameplay elements.

Any game that wants to join the elite PC first-person shooter club these days has to bring something different with it, rather than simply trying to ape the club's founder members. *Deus Ex*, for example, stood out thanks to its subtle RPG elements, while *Half-Life*'s seamless integration of set-pieces helped lift it to classic status. Crytek seems to have realised this, because the trump card for its FPS *Far Cry* seems to be the best artificial intelligence we've seen in any game yet.

While the story of *Far Cry* washed over us, the AI demanded to be noticed. You'll see enemies use nearby objects and jungle foliage to hide before they swarm you in packs, covering each other and shouting instructions. There's a real feeling of being up against living, breathing opponents when you watch a grunt dart behind a tree for cover and scream for reinforcements.

"THE DIFFICULTY LEVEL CAN OFTEN PROVE FRUSTRATING RATHER THAN CHALLENGING"

It's not just when attacking that they show off their Mensa-like intelligence either; soldiers will run back to the rest of their group if they've been cut off or, more impressively, fire a flare into the air to signal that you've been found. It creates a tense atmosphere as you try to pick your way through the tropical undergrowth.

With stealth being in vogue, it's not surprising to see a bit of sneaking in *Far Cry*'s gameplay, and these elements are nicely implemented. Enemies show up on a radar in the corner of the screen, detailing their position, where they're looking and their 'alert' status – so far, so usual. However, the difference here is that whenever you shoot, soundwaves spread through the radar; if the soundwaves pass over a guard on your radar, he'll investigate the noise. It's a clever way of using sound and the right choice of weapon really pays off; if you want to silently work your way through a patrol squad one by one, a silenced machine gun will do the job better than a jackhammer shotgun.

Set on a tropical island, *Far Cry*'s locale makes a pleasant change from the grimy, post-apocalyptic worlds of most FPS titles. There's more variation here than you think – sometimes you'll be trooping through dense foliage under the cover of night, other times you can be using a beach bungalow as cover. The end of the first level sees you swimming out to a shipwrecked tanker, complete with snipers and circling patrol boats; pleasingly, you can use the patrol boats (complete with mounted guns) yourself. Vehicles make for some thrilling set-pieces, such as storming beaches in a jeep or using a boat to work your way up-river and take out the guards on the riverbanks. Control is a little haphazard at times, but it's a problem that should easily be addressed before release.

Our only major concern is that the AI is so far advanced that the game is actually too difficult at times. With enemies constantly ducking for cover it's near impossible to pick them off as they call for back-up to beat you with numbers, or simply wait for you to make a mistake. Despite the frequent checkpoints to keep everything ticking along, *Far Cry* is still incredibly tough. In the build we played, the difficulty level would more often than not prove frustrating rather than challenging. If Crytek tones it down so the game is forgiving and some of the gameplay mechanics are tightened up, we predict that come its release date, *Far Cry* will be turning heads.



Vehicles come in handy for making a fast escape, although the enemy can use them as well…

I'LL DRIVE, YOU SHOOT

The ubiquitous Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch modes are present in *Far Cry*, but it's the Team Assault mode that we suspect will grab people's attention. One team must defend their flagpole while the attackers have to reach it and raise their flag; sounds simple, but the addition of vehicles, classes (mechanics can build gun turrets, medics can heal, and so on) and the open levels give this a unique feel. In particular, having someone drive a jeep and another team member ride shotgun is a highlight that many multiplayer games don't have. Crytek has also included a Sandbox Editor – a custom-made level creator that seems incredibly intuitive.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Crytek was established four years ago when brothers Cevat, Faruk and Avni Yerli worked over the internet and assembled a demo called *Dinosaur Island* using their own engine. After attracting the attention of Ubisoft, the team's first project was renamed *X-Isle* before eventually becoming *Far Cry*.

HISTORY

FAR CRY IS THE FIRST TITLE TO BE DEVELOPED BY CRYTEK

"EVERYONE WILL REMEMBER FAR CRY AS THE GAME THAT INTRODUCED THE NEXT WAVE OF 'MUST-HAVE' FPS FEATURES"

RICHARD TSAO, MULTIPLAYER PRODUCER, CRYTEK

The fearsome AI means enemies will lie in wait then get together for an ambush. Damn.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

IN THE JUNGLE, THE MIGHTY JUNGLE...

PREDATOR + HALF-LIFE x FORGIVENESS = FAR CRY

The level of detail on show in *Far Cry* is really rather breathtaking sometimes. We're very impressed…

The tropical setting opens up innovative gameplay options – fight them on the beaches…

BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE EIGHTIES GEEK PASTIME COMES OF AGE…

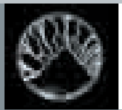
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS + STAR WARS: KOTOR + LIBRARY GEEKS = BALDUR'S GATE: DA II

"YOU'LL SEE MORE SPECIAL EFFECTS AND BETTER LOOKING CHARACTERS, THE CAMERA CAN BE ZOOMED IN A LITTLE ON THE FLY, AND WE HAVE BIGGER WORLDS"

SCOTT LANE, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, BLACK ISLE STUDIOS

■ Enemies are varied, though a rolled-up newspaper won't always defeat the tougher ones…

■ One quest will end with the villain literally bringing the house down.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Black Isle Studios has a strong reputation for delivering involving and detailed RPGs. The developer is a division of Interplay and was set up to focus on RPGs. To this end, the programming talent is assisted by writers and artists whose previous work includes developing table-top Dungeons & Dragons campaigns.

HISTORY

- **BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE** 2001 [PS2]
- **BALDUR'S GATE: THE ORIGINAL SAGA** 1998 [PC]
- **FALLOUT** 1996 [PC]



Locations are varied, ranging from forests to dungeons to caves.

The gameplay lacks the freeform structure of some recent titles, but is still solid.

THE GATES ARE OPEN AGAIN, BUT DO YOU WANT TO GO IN?

Console gamers, especially PS2 owners, can be a fairly impatient bunch. When the original *Baldur's Gate* was released back in 2001 it was generally dismissed as a lame *Gauntlet* clone. How wrong they were. The first *Baldur's Gate* was actually a slick interpretation of the Dungeons & Dragons rule set and fantasy world. This sequel picks up where the original ended, with a party of adventurers lost in a distant world and a new evil rising from the ashes to threaten the city of Baldur's Gate.

Once again, the game is viewed from above and the majority of levels are based in maze-like dungeons, caverns and temples (yes, like *Gauntlet*). It is also has a heavy leaning towards action and combat, again like, er, *Gauntlet*. Despite first impressions though, *Dark Alliance II* has plenty of substance. The combat is based around the Dungeons & Dragons twelfth edition rule set, so every blow and magical attack is calculated against the enemy's armour class, speed and elemental strengths. To succeed in these constant clashes against Orcs, Demons and Ice Trolls, you'll have to develop new weapons, imbue your armour with elemental protection and generally tailor your D&D-influenced items to be most effective against the new enemy. Heading into the Ocean Temple Caves, for instance? Best look towards fire elements then.

> "DARK ALLIANCE II IS SHAPING UP TO BE A FAR FROM ORIGINAL BUT WHOLLY ENTERTAINING ACTION RPG"

In this respect, *Dark Alliance II* isn't too much of a development over the original *Baldur's Gate* on PS2, or indeed, that different to the general rules of all RPGs. Where *Dark Alliance II* differs is in its structure. The game is roughly three times the size of the original and features many subsidiary missions; on one quest through a misty swamp you save a caravan of merchants, this opens a new rescue mission to a secret area of the map. Will you continue on your original quest or rescue the maiden? It isn't blazing a totally original trail to the degree that, say, BioWare's *Knights Of The Old Republic* has done, but for an action game of this kind, the freedom is very welcome.

And from the early code, the *Dark Alliance II* world looks to be rich and detailed enough to make you want to keep exploring. Though many levels are simply elaborate mazes, the quality of the pre-rendered scenery and fluid animation of the creatures is such that you'll want to keep exploring to see what fantastical visions are coming next. The early swamps and manor dungeons trade places with later levels set in sparkling caverns and a particularly impressive marble temple.

Though there are some improvements over the original game, such as the more flexible quest structure and weapon development, *Dark Alliance II* isn't totally original, and in fact looks to suffer from the elements that made many gamers label it a *Gauntlet* clone. Overlooking the RPG elements, the game essentially boils down to exploring dungeons and clubbing ever bigger creatures with ever more elaborate weapons. The big worry is surely that by making the game bigger, Black Isle is simply stretching the formula to its limits and highlighting the series' main failing – its repetition.

Dark Alliance II is shaping up to be a far from original but wholly entertaining RPG, which will be very welcome on the PS2. But anyone who's spent time in *Knights Of The Old Republic*'s distant galaxies may be left unsatisfied.

FREE MARKETS

As in the original *Baldur's Gate*, much of the gameplay here is built around developing your character. Now though, weapons can be developed and enchanted, while swords and armour can be imbued with elements and magical stones to develop their abilities. It's important to build items in this way in order to amass an arsenal of weapons that will be useful against all of the game's creatures. Balancing opposing elements will be vital, but get things wrong and items can be sold back to a shopkeeper at a profit. Black Isle is making an effort to promote the item creation element of the game. In theory, this will encourage players to explore more of the game world and, more importantly, develop a character of their own making.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC, GBA
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Acclaim
DEVELOPER: Black Isle Studios
RELEASE: Jan '04
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1-2

Black Isle's latest PS2 instalment of the classic D&D series is turning into a strong and involving title that fans of action RPGs will adore.

S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: OBLIVION LOST

HOW CAN THE SAME SHIT HAPPEN TO THE SAME POWER PLANT TWICE?

They say lightning never strikes twice, but that's the scenario Ukrainian developer GSC Gaming World is using as the backdrop for the ambitious *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Oblivion Lost*, setting it in the aftermath of yet another catastrophic explosion near the ill-fated Chernobyl site. The repercussions of the second incident – which takes place in 2008, just over 20 years after the actual disaster of 1986 – are far more devastating than the first, with radiation levels preventing rescuers from reaching the affected area in even the most advanced safety gear. This sinister region is known as The Zone and has grown to around 30-square kilometres by the time the first investigators begin to explore its outer limits some four years after the event. Which is where you come in…

The game sees players assuming the role of a so-called Stalker – a poacher who enters The Zone illegally in search of matter that has taken on anomalous powers and can fetch quite a price in the outside world among scientists and underground dealers. The concept can be traced back to a Russian sci-fi novel that formed the basis of 1979 movie *Stalker*, which followed a group of fortune hunters pilfering from a similarly quarantined area after an alien landing. Yet while replacing this extraterrestrial scenario with one whose roots are based in reality may appear to border on the distasteful, the Kiev-based developer's proximity to the disaster area (the father of one of the designers was involved in building the concrete sarcophagus that now entombs the power station's remains) should ensure any offence is tactfully avoided.

Being only a couple of hours down the road from Chernobyl also enabled the team to visit and extensively photograph the ghostly region, and around 60 per cent of the buildings featured in the massive 30-square-kilometre game world are exact replications of their real-life counterparts. The dormant towns of Chernobyl and Pripyat, and the overgrown woodland and countless abandoned industrial facilities that make up The Zone, have been immaculately recreated using GSC's incredibly powerful X-Ray engine and can be freely explored at will.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the game is this freeform structure of play, which was inspired by the likes of epic space-trading sim *Elite*. Players won't be subjected to a linear level structure but must instead attempt to build their fortune by opportunistically wheeling, dealing and accepting missions from various parties en route to eventually reaching one of the game's eight different endings. Progression through the evolving storyline is partly managed by areas of hazardous radiation that permit access only to players who have accumulated enough roubles to furnish themselves with the necessary protective equipment.

A variety of vehicles can be acquired or bought to make navigating the vast area much easier, but, more importantly, the selection of 30 modifiable weapons gives the more adventurous Stalker better odds of survival against the hordes of horrifically mutated monsters, military patrolmen and rival Stalkers that make earning a living in The Zone such a perilous profession. The fascinating blend of brutal FPS action and open-ended role play combined with the chilling believability of its post-apocalyptic setting means we'll be keeping a close eye on *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* in the coming months.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Ukraine
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: GSC Gaming World
RELEASE: Q2 '04
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-TBC

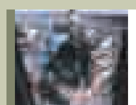
GSC Gaming World recreates a chilling Chernobyl aftermath and fleshes out the mutant-blasting action with open-ended adventuring.

FACT OR FICTION?

Aside from the ambitious freeform structure, one of the game's biggest draws is bound to be the X-Ray engine's ability to generate breathtaking aesthetics. Along with a ridiculous number of polygons per frame delivering photorealistic graphical quality, the game world also boasts dynamic weather conditions and full day/night cycles along with an unscripted simulation of behaviour patterns for The Zone's inhabitants. Ensuring players receive a different experience with every play, these natural cycles and AI routines also combine with the strikingly authentic surroundings to produce an absorbing universe that blurs the lines between the real Chernobyl region and a fictional land of horrors.

> "SIXTY PER CENT OF BUILDINGS IN THE VAST GAME WORLD ARE REPLICATIONS OF THEIR REAL-LIFE COUNTERPARTS"


In case you've never been there, many of the eerie backdrops you'll see in The Zone are re-creations of the Chernobyl area.



DISASTER PROFILE

On 26 April 1986 a meltdown at Chernobyl's atomic power plant became the worst nuclear disaster in history. The aftermath saw radioactivity spreading over a 10,000km radius and it is estimated only 15 per cent of the 750,000 people involved in the clean-up operation have survived without any sign of cancer.

HISTORY

- **EFFECTS TO HAVE DISPERSED** [3000]
- **CHERNOBYL DISASTER** [1986]
- **CONSTRUCTION FLAWS NOTED** [1979]

Besides the standard health meter, other needs like tiredness mean you'll have to find a safe place to get some shut-eye.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

LOOK WHO'S S.T.A.L.K.I.N.G.

TARKOVSKY'S STALKER + CHERNOBYL x ELITE = S.T.A.L.K.E.R.

"GONE IS THE SAFETY OF PSEUDO-REALISTIC GAMES – S.T.A.L.K.E.R. WORKS WITH THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE MOST SINISTER, NATURAL WAYS"

THQ PRESS RELEASE

You'll come across all manner of mutant creatures merrily going about their business around the blighted landscape.

MONSTER HUNTER



■ You aren't seriously thinking about making that thing angry, are you?

THERE'LL BE NO BRAVELY RUNNING AWAY FROM THIS ONE

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC '04
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ Form a squad and hunt things down to extinction. It'll be years before the law tries to stop you…

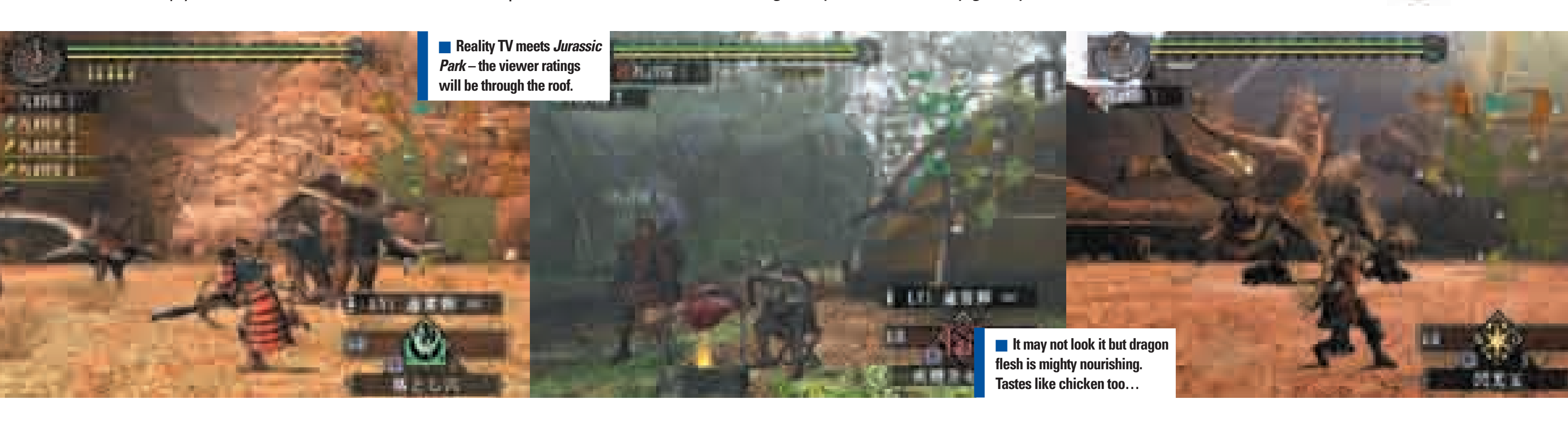
However good many modern RPGs have been, there's always some degree of artistic licence taken with the combat capabilities of party members and the scale of the freaks that they bring down. As any RPG veteran will tell you, even that little ball of coloured fluff that you parade around purely for comedy value can annihilate enemies hundreds of times its size in a single blow given enough 'training' (read: traipsing backwards and forwards and beating the same generic creatures ad infinitum). Capcom, it would seem, isn't a huge believer in such nonsense and if you want to bring down something bigger than you, you're going to need a lot of help, a lot of skill and a hell of a lot of luck…

Monster Hunter's main innovations revolve around the integration of all of the game's elements; while so many other titles would be content just to let you team up and take down huge creatures, Capcom's effort has plenty more to offer. Starting out by formulating a cunning plan and setting a trap (which will vary greatly depending on the size, intelligence, manoeuvrability and ferocity of your target) one of your number will usually have to act as bait to lure the creature in. Once it (or they, if you're tough or foolish enough to take on multiple monsters) falls in a hole, gets blown up or finds itself trapped depending on the pitfall chosen, it's up to your party to move in for the kill.

"FROM UNIQUE CONCEPT TO LUSH IMPLEMENTATION, MONSTER HUNTER IMPRESSES EVEN AT THIS EARLY STAGE"

The fun doesn't end when the prey goes down either, and after sharing out the spoils of the hunt, those of you with the right skills can even pull the fallen beast to pieces and cook up a tasty meal to restore the vitality of your squad, or fashion equipment from its remains.

Aside from this ingenuity and involvement, very little is known about *Monster Hunter*. The game is still young and the development process is ongoing, but more than a few heads were turned by its stand at the Tokyo Game Show. If the final product can actually produce the level of teamwork that's been promised, it should prove to be an appealing and unique online prospect. Similarly, we're still unsure how single-player will work – if it even exists at all – but with so long to go until we'll see any kind of playable version, there's an awful lot we don't know. Sad but true.



■ Reality TV meets *Jurassic Park* – the viewer ratings will be through the roof.

■ It may not look it but dragon flesh is mighty nourishing. Tastes like chicken too…


eMag

ONIMUSHA 3



Ooh, guns – pretty useless against demons, unless you're Dante.

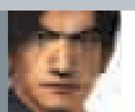
Fans of the original games will recognise many of the locations.

"WHEREAS SAMONASUKE, THE HERO OF ONIMUSHA AND ONIMUSHA 2, IS REALLY POPULAR IN JAPAN, JEAN RENO IS POPULAR GLOBALLY"
KEIJI INAFUNE, PRODUCER, CAPCOM

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ONIMUSHA 3 SLICED OPEN

ONIMUSHA 2 × AKIRA KUROSAWA + MOROCCAN-BORN FRENCHMAN = ONIMUSHA 3

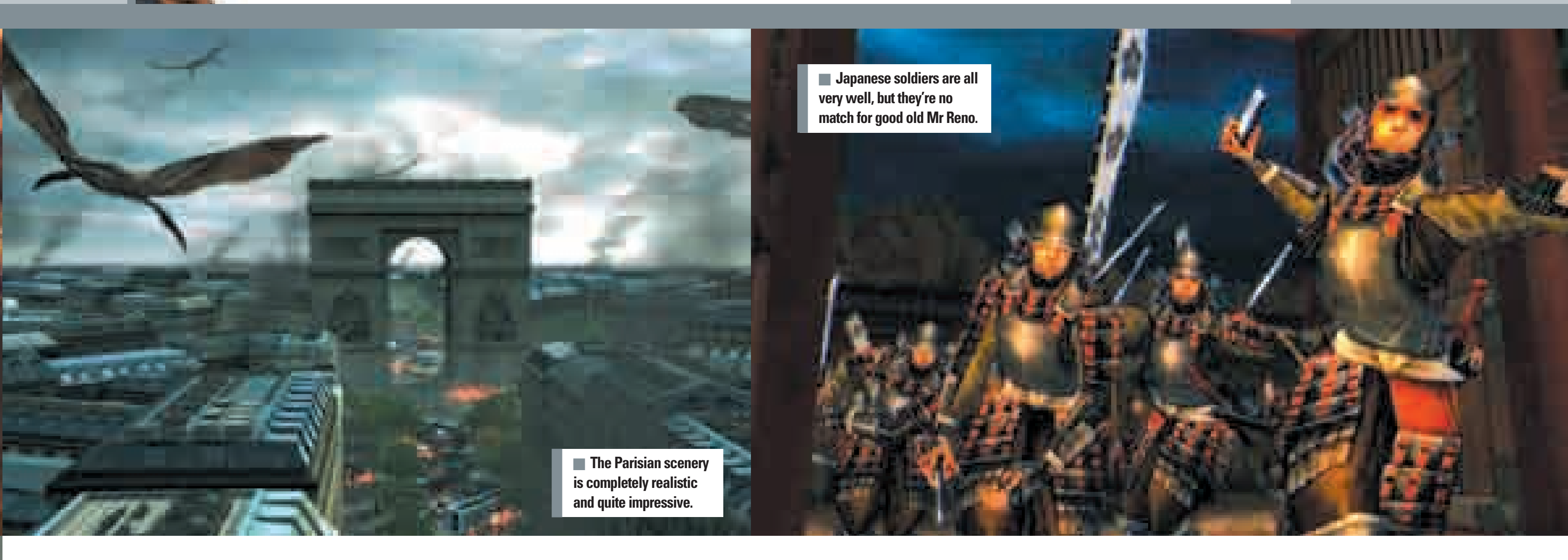


DEVELOPER PROFILE

Capcom's biggest hit was *Street Fighter II*, released in 1991. Despite the huge amount of money the company made from the game, it still had the gall to charge £70 for it. Capcom is a cute way of representing the firm's original name, Capsule Computers.

HISTORY

- **ONIMUSHA** 2001 [PlayStation2]
- **DEVIL MAY CRY** 2001 [PlayStation2]
- **RESIDENT EVIL** 1996 [PlayStation]



Japanese soldiers are all very well, but they're no match for good old Mr Reno.

The Parisian scenery is completely realistic and quite impressive.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC, GBA
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom
RELEASE: Q2 '04
GENRE: Arcade adventure
PLAYERS: 1

It's *Onimusha 2*, but with more combat and a Moroccan-born French actor.

SWORDS, DEMONS ET LE PETIT MORT…

PS2 **Impressed by money? *Onimusha 2* was one of the most expensive videogames ever made, costing around ten million dollars.** Quite a lot when you consider that the game wasn't an original property, or didn't require a huge pay-off to a shadowy figure in Hollywood. Impressed by movies? *Onimusha 3*'s opening FMV will be six minutes long and has been helmed by two directors; Takashi Yamazaki, director of *Jununairu* (Japan's answer to *E.T.*), has overseen the entire project while Donnie Yen, the fight choreographer on *Blade 2* (among many others), handles the almost excessively sexual combat. With all this attention, and yen, splashed upon just one section of a game that isn't even interactive (bar your ability to press the skip button) you know that Capcom isn't messing around this time. It's going all out. It's hired Jean Reno and has given him a whip. It means business.

Onimusha 3's twist is the time-travelling element; Akechi Samanosuke's battle against the demonic Nobunaga sees him warped through a space-time rift that rips him from Japan, 1582, and drops him in Paris, 2004. Jacques Blanc (hypnotised-puffin impersonator Jean Reno) gets to see his city ravaged by the armies of darkness, then gets sucked back in time. Whether or not producer Keiji Inafune has seen Reno's century-hopping movie *Les Visiteurs* is unknown. What we do know is that the Moroccan-born actor famed for immortalising Natalie Portman as a deeply concerning pre-pubescent object of fascination gets to introduce feudal Japan to automatic weaponry (big wow – they've got demons to contend with) as well as that bastion of quirky combat, the bull whip.

The game will be divided into two time zones while playing heavily on the fish-out-of-water narrative dynamic that surely sucked its last breath with the release of *Crocodile Dundee 3*. Obviously, this time such a trick isn't being played for diminishing box-office returns; au contraire – Capcom hopes that Reno's European following will bring in new fans and their money. After all, a six-minute FMV sequence has never funded itself…

Samanosuke's deft control of a blade is a given. What will be fresh (yet with a musty whiff of *Devil May Cry*) will be Blanc's use of his whip. Not only will Indiana Jones' show-stealing weapon of choice allow for gun/whip combos, it will allow him swing to areas that can only be reached by, er, swinging. To have Jean Reno in a game is a masterstroke, to get him nipping around like Indiana Jones doing an impersonation of a hypnotised puffin is beyond genius, and for this reason only the game deserves an anticipation rating of ten.

It has the bar-raising opening, it has the internationally acceptable stars and it has the environments resplendent in high resolution and full 3D. The game will be beautiful, no doubt about it. Varied in background style, slick with three-dimensional representation and giddy with environmental effects. Thankfully, the series has imbued us with the faith that the final game will be more than the sum of all its parts. The *Onimusha* franchise has been building in momentum and, unlike *Devil May Cry*, has yet to falter under the weight of its own self belief.

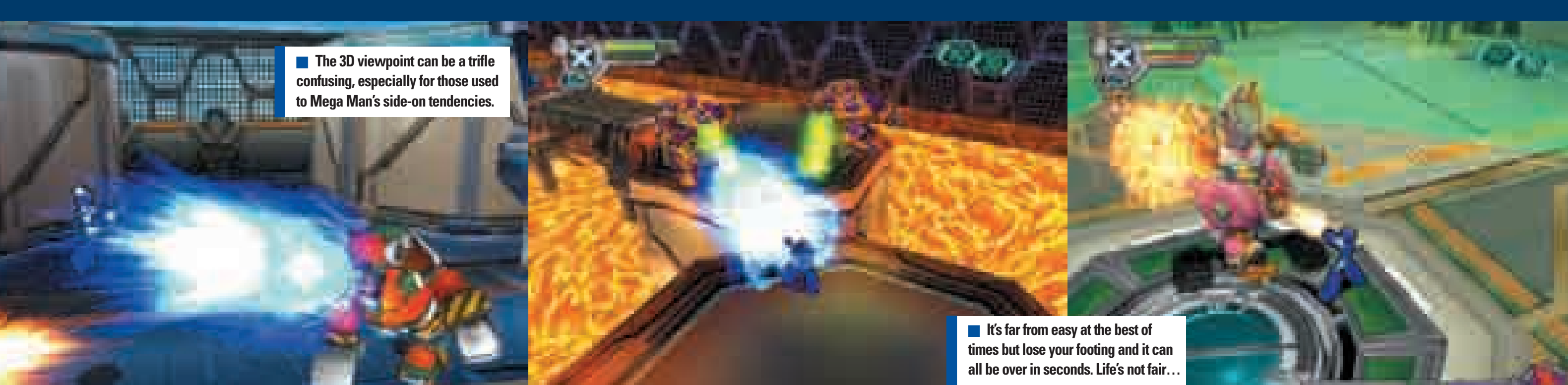
We also have faith in Reno. The man turned down the role of Agent Smith in *The Matrix* to play a forgettable stereotype in the train-crash *Godzilla*. He's been courted by productions based on flash effects before. Let's hope he's picked the right one this time.

"THIS GAME WILL BE VARIED IN BACKGROUND STYLE, SLICK WITH 3D REPRESENTATION AND GIDDY WITH ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS"

LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, FRATERNITÉ

Previous *Onimusha* titles have given texture to their narratives by including appearances from historical figures of the Muromachi period such as Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Oda Nobunaga. With instalment number three being split between two separate periods we can only pray that Capcom does the same trick and includes contemporary characters. The thought of Jacques Chirac popping up to tell our heroes "non!" is too good not to be true. Fingers are crossed.

MEGAMAN X-7



The 3D viewpoint can be a trifle confusing, especially for those used to Mega Man's side-on tendencies.

It's far from easy at the best of times but lose your footing and it can all be over in seconds. Life's not fair…

LITTLE BOY BLUE, COME BLOW THINGS UP

PS2 **Call us old-fashioned or cynical but there are certain franchises that simply don't need or benefit from a 3D makeover.** We're perfectly happy to see a series branch off in a completely new direction or embrace the latest technology but it's often all too obvious when an ageing title is polished up through a feeling of obligation, and we can't help thinking that this is the case here.

We say this because while *X-7*'s 2.5D viewpoint is quite easy on the eye, Capcom has been far too insistent on including constant and annoying reminders of the new engine. Certain sections will take on a slanted viewpoint just because they can (despite the fact that this makes the game notably more difficult to play) while others see you running into the screen – these are less memorable still.

It's almost as though a fully three-dimensional game was planned and even begun before being hastily scrapped, with several sections being retained to simulate variety in a more traditional adventure. If it weren't for the fact that the side-on sections continue the legacy of the series fairly well, it'd be all too easy for Mega Man to slip into a polygon hell.

Frankly, this combines the games you know and love with some 'original' new sections that you don't know and most likely won't love. The most frustrating thing, though, is that while many areas of the game do show promise, it's just so busy concentrating on squeezing in as many elements as possible that none of them are as focused as they should be. The majority of the traditional sections feel roughly as they ought to, and the ability to switch between characters is a neat touch, but this genre is very dependant upon solidity and this is a title with not quite enough to go around.

There's plenty of fun to be had even with this early code but there's at least as much that needs some kind of attention before the game skulks out (as it invariably will) lest fans be left disappointed and the rest of the world unaware that *X-7* even exists. The pretty visuals will keep the anti-sprite brigade at bay and may even convert a few non-believers, but short of a content overhaul, we can't see this challenging previous *Megaman X* titles in terms of quality.

Still, there's a little time for the clever chaps at Capcom to work their magic before the public gets its hands on the game. We can only hope that the months before *Megaman X-7*'s release are put to good use, but the fact that many of the problems we've mentioned are ingrained in the game itself is not a good sign…

"THE TRICKY GAMEPLAY AND OFTEN-CONFUSING POLYGON ABUSE IS A DECIDEDLY UNHEALTHY COMBINATION"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Feb '04 (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Platform
PLAYERS: 1

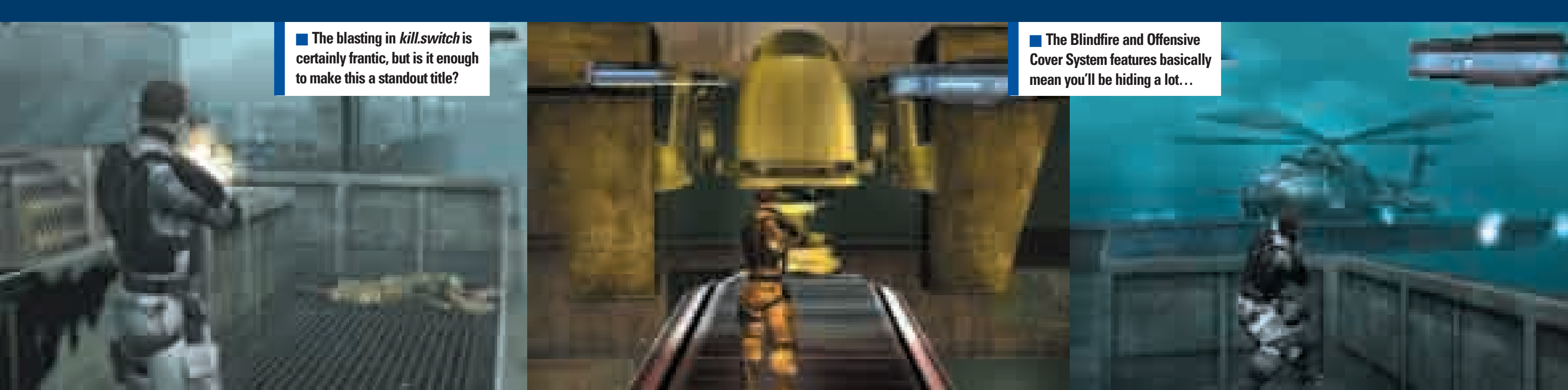
Capcom does a grand job of proving that while you actually can teach an old dog new tricks, there's little point in doing so…



Perhaps we can interest sir in a huge robot? One previous owner, and blue *is* the new black…


eMag

KILL.SWITCH


The blasting in *kill.switch* is certainly frantic, but is it enough to make this a standout title?

The Blindfire and Offensive Cover System features basically mean you'll be hiding a lot…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Namco
RELEASE: Feb '04 (Japan/US: Out Now)
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

It may be a one-trick pony, but imposing the perpetual use of cover turns out to be a pretty good trick.

CAN NAMCO SHOOT IT OUT WITH THE BEST OF THEM?

In this day and age, any third-person shooter wanting to make its mark on the heavily overcrowded genre must have at least one intriguing twist on the standard formula to stand a chance. Recently, the most successful variations on the theme have side-stepped the scourge of mediocrity by focusing on either the concept of stealth or commanding a small squad of characters, but how does a generic all-action affair like *kill.switch* go about justifying its existence amidst the sea of similar titles?

The harshest of critics wouldn't be totally unjustified in saying 'it doesn't', but Namco's forthcoming military action romp does have one trick up its sleeve that is surprisingly effective at spicing up the conventional run-and-gun gameplay. Although the ability to take cover behind objects and even peek around corners tends to feature in just about every decent shooter these days, never has the idea played such a central role. Environments are littered with burnt-out vehicles, stone pillars and upturned furniture, and the intensity of enemy fire ensures you'll find yourself pinned down behind these objects for much of the game.

In a similar fashion to *The Getaway*, players can then choose to lay down suppressing fire for themselves by shooting blindly in the enemy's direction (using the innovatively named Blindfire feature), or risk leaning out into the open for a split second to get a more accurate shot. As the conveyor belt of adversaries rolls in, you're forced to dive from one covered position to another, but since the enemy AI has been finely tuned to counteract this style of combat, the sanctuary of each shelter tends to have a limited lifespan.

Not only will the attacking forces mirror your use of the environment to keep out of the line of fire, they'll cleverly work together to flank your position and prevent you from ever getting comfortable. The resulting action is both engaging and intense, yet the constant repetition of this scenario does become horribly monotonous after a while.

With only the flimsiest of cladding on its insubstantial gameplay bones and a reputed lifespan of just six hours, we can't help but fear *kill.switch*'s severe lack of depth will ultimately overshadow the appeal of its riveting, if repetitive, firefights.

"ENEMIES CLEVERLY WORK TOGETHER TO FLANK YOUR POSITION AND PREVENT YOU FROM GETTING COMFORTABLE"


He may look like Solid Snake, but we can assure you stealth isn't a word in this guy's vocabulary.


eMag

SPY VS SPY

THE SPIES ARE BACK AS YOU'VE NEVER SEEN THEM BEFORE



The original Black and White spies are joined by all-new characters Grey and Robo Spy.

PS2 **With the very mention that ground-breaking retro classic *Spy vs Spy* is being reworked for release across all next-generation consoles, anyone who ever had the pleasure of sampling the original's manic 'joke and dagger' action will have already made up their mind about the forthcoming remake.** In particular, those with the fondest memories of First Star Software's 8-bit trilogy will have joined one of two camps. The promise of the ingeniously addictive gameplay formula being embellished with today's cutting-edge technology instinctively conjures up a rush of excitement at the prospect of what could be an irresistible recipe for gaming goodness. However, a far greater proportion of gamers will draw on past experience and fear the good name of the series is about to become irreversibly tarnished.

The franchise's most recent outing was back in 1999 when the advent of a link cable enabled its resurrection on the Game Boy Color, yet despite offering encouraging signs that the basic concept still hit the mark some 15 years after it was first devised, the machine's visual capabilities ensured the game retained its traditionally simplistic 2D surroundings. But with a transition into the realm of 3D bringing with it a complete overhaul in both visual style and, most significantly, gameplay dynamics, can developer Way Forward live up to its name or will the game's magic be lost outside its intimate 2D setting?

Details are still hazy at this stage, but the new 3D arenas are to be populated by not two, but four warring super-spies as the familiar Black Spy and White Spy are joined by newcomers Grey Spy and Robo Spy. The object of the game remains the same – hunt for a series of items and escape with them all before your rivals catch up with you. A vastly expanded arsenal of weaponry will be scattered around to use when you cross paths with an opponent, but, more importantly, a whole new range of hilarious booby traps can be laid in the hope that your adversaries will inadvertently stumble across a suitably comedic downfall.

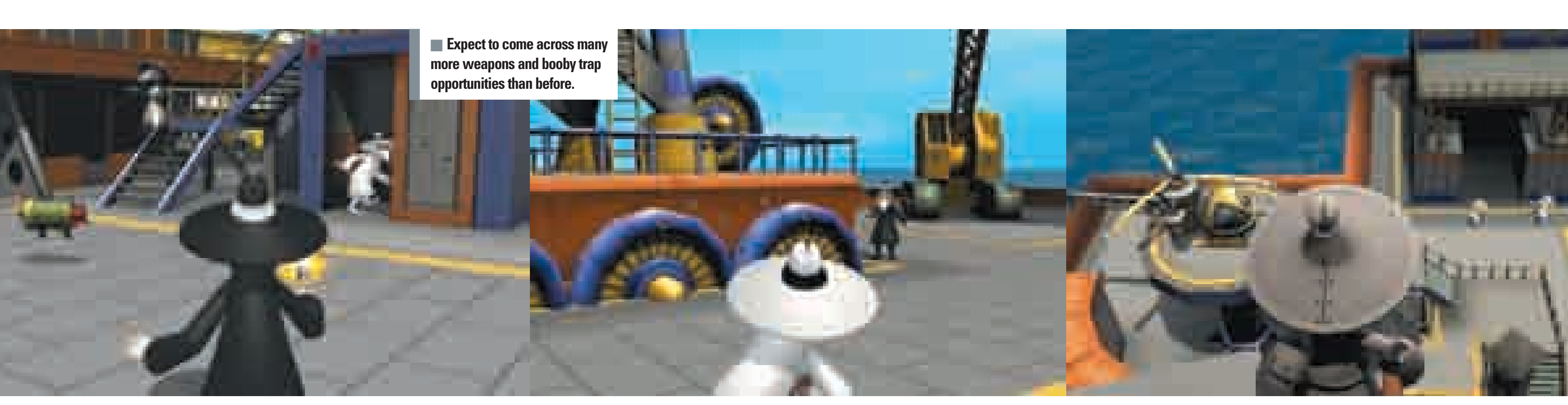
With *Spy vs Spy*'s release still a few months off, there's plenty of time for the anticipation to build. Let's hope we won't be disappointed.

"THE NEW 3D ARENAS WILL BE POPULATED BY NOT TWO, BUT FOUR WARRING SUPER-SPIES"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: TDK
DEVELOPER: Way Forward
RELEASE: Q2 '04
GENRE: Action Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-4

They were pioneers of the Capture The Flag concept, but how will the Spies fare today?



Expect to come across many more weapons and booby trap opportunities than before.


eMag

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE EARTH



With so many units under your command at once, most standard infantry will come grouped into battalions.

Powerful creatures like trolls are able to use trees and boulders as makeshift weapons.

EA INVITES US TO COMMAND AND CONQUER THE ARMIES OF MIDDLE EARTH

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '04
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1 (TBA Online)

The team behind the *C&C* series looks to recreate those epic battles from the *Lord Of The Rings* movies in glorious 3D.

If ever there was a licence crying out to be translated into an epic real-time strategy game, it would have to be Tolkien's *The Lord Of The Rings* saga. With a backdrop of possibly the most fascinating mythical universe ever created, a diverse population of intriguing characters, and a timeless storyline binding the whole thing together, surely such rich foundations would denote a recipe for success? That's clearly what Vivendi hoped when it secured the rights to Tolkien's literary works and oversaw production of Middle Earth-based RTS title *War Of The Ring*. Yet the lacklustre product proved the power of the licence had to be properly harnessed if any of its potential was to be realised.

Enter EA with its talented team of *Command & Conquer* developers and exclusive rights to Peter Jackson's silver-screen adaptation of the literary masterpiece, determined to give such a mouth-watering concept the treatment it deserves. Vivendi may have been granted use of the *LOTR* legend for its hack 'n' slash action games, but it was forced to create its own incarnations of the series' creatures and characters, whereas EA has access to a ready-made freak show designed for the big-budget movies. But as with EA's titles, the game will feature the vocal talents of the movies' cast, plus the rousing musical score and lush environments based on the stunning film sets.

The constraints of the licence do restrict the developer from venturing far beyond events depicted in the films, but thankfully the trilogy contains more than enough epic battles from which to derive the game's 25 mission scenarios. Players can expect to revisit the mass battlefield confrontations at Isengard, Helm's Deep and, reputedly the most breathtaking of them all (we've not seen it yet), the attack on Minas Tirith from the third movie. These are the undisputed highlights of Peter Jackson's handiwork, and EA is working to ensure their videogame counterparts capture the scale and excitement that thrilled cinema audiences whilst this time putting players in total control of the fracas as it unfolds.

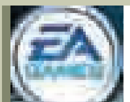
With the ambitious 3D engine featured in *Command & Conquer: Generals* as a starting point, the development team of RTS experts (including several of the minds behind the *C&C* series) are certain they can achieve such a feat. It is hoped that the finished version of the game will showcase upwards of 500 individual units battling it out on screen at a time while keeping the frame rate respectable and AI at an appropriately high standard. Players will be able to lead the gallant armies of Gondor and Rohan into battle or choose to command the evil forces of Isengard and Mordor, each with unique unit types and diverse styles of play. The heavy emphasis on siege warfare will also carry over into the gameplay, placing vastly differing tools and strategies at the disposal of attacking and defending parties.

The fact that the game isn't billed for release until the close of 2004 gives some indication of EA's commitment to delivering something special with this project. From these early glimpses of the epic battles we can expect to be engaging in this time next year, *The Battle For Middle Earth* looks more than capable of filling the void left by the conclusion of the movie trilogy.

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

Battles will play out very differently depending on whether you're orchestrating Orcs or manoeuvring men, but the most notable disparity will obviously be the types of unit available to each side. The good guys will benefit from the heroic talents of Gandalf, Aragon and Legolas, who each proved a match for several hundred adversaries in the movies and will apparently be immortal for the sake of the game's story (but can be indefinitely incapacitated in battle). Mighty beasts like Trolls and Elks offer each army plenty of brute force, while a selection of creatures from Wargs to the dragon-like Fell-beasts will also provide air- and land-based vehicular support.

"THE GAME WILL SHOWCASE UPWARDS OF 500 INDIVIDUAL UNITS BATTLING IT OUT ON SCREEN AT A TIME"



DEVELOPER PROFILE

When EA bought *Command & Conquer* developer Westwood Studios back in 1998, it acquired both the respected *C&C* brand and much of the team behind the original game. Westwood had been founded 13 years earlier and was a key pioneer of the RTS genre with the likes of *Dune II* in 1992.

HISTORY

- **COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS** 2003 [PC]
- **COMMAND & CONQUER RENEGADE** 2002 [PC]
- **COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 2** 2000 [PC]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ONE GAME TO RULE THEM ALL?

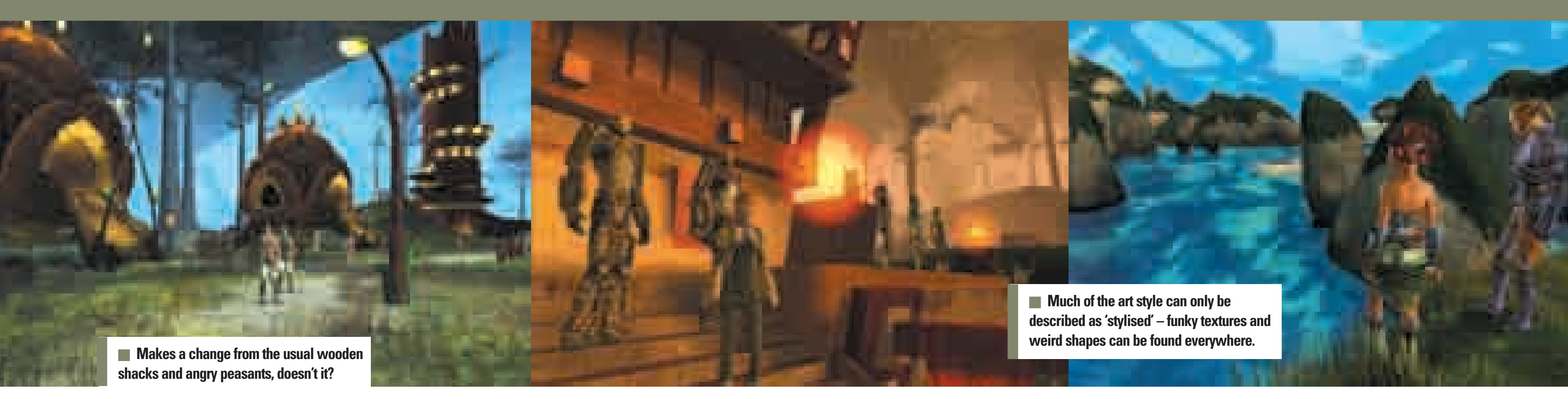
C&C: GENERALS + MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR x MIDDLE EARTH = LOTR: TBFME

"FANS WILL BE ABLE TO EXPERIENCE THE LORD OF THE RINGS MOVIE TRILOGY LIKE NEVER BEFORE"

MARK SKAGGS, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, EA

Attacking armies will use siege equipment, while the besieged can riddle their perimeter with traps and ambushes.

THE SAGA OF RYZOM



Makes a change from the usual wooden shacks and angry peasants, doesn't it?

Much of the art style can only be described as 'stylised' – funky textures and weird shapes can be found everywhere.

MILLIONS OF ACRES AND NOT A GOBLIN IN SIGHT…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Wanadoo
DEVELOPER: Nevrax
RELEASE: TBC '04
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1-TBC

Newcomer Nevrax serves up a delightful twist on the fantasy MMORPG with a unique style and plenty of substance.

For the PC gamer with too much time on their hands, there's a veritable banquet of great fantasy MMORPGs to choose from, but to a genre newcomer or veteran, it can be very hard to know where to start or stop respectively. Similarly, most titles follow the well-trodden 'goblins, orcs, dungeons and dragons' path without stopping to think that this might not necessarily be what gamers want to see. The millions of *EverQuest* addicts would go some way towards disproving this fact, but there's always room for another game, particularly if it's one that's prepared to do things slightly differently. Enter *Ryzom*, a game that combines the potential and depth of many of its competitors with slightly retro yet beautiful graphics; it looks to be the missing link between existing titles and the likes of *True Fantasy Live Online*.

The big selling point for the game so far is its sumptuous and unique art style; everything from the game universe to its many and varied inhabitants takes on the distinct look and benefits massively for it, especially against the backdrop of so many identikit MMORPGs. Even the range of characters on offer is a breath of fresh air compared to the many dwarves, elves and barbarians vying for your time and money, and the customisation of *Ryzom*'s protagonists is equally impressive. The detail in this stunningly surreal game world is another noteworthy point, as the many varied locales will soon become familiar as you follow your epic quest of self improvement.

For all its stylistic merits, *Ryzom* throws its fair share of original ideas into the mix as well as encompassing many of the finer points of the genre. Players can assign their characters jobs rather than classes, meaning that you're not pinned down by an initial selection; and like the sublime *Final Fantasy Tactics*, changing profession is a simple affair with many benefits. Experience is awarded in your professional field as well – a humble merchant won't have to resort to slaying dragons (or any of the less familiar denizens of Atys) to level up, although the option is always there for the more adventurous shopkeeper.

The beta testing is now well under way and feedback has been favourable, so we're looking forward to a more cuddly kind of guild joining, Caprynis slaying and life wrecking in 2004.

"LANDSCAPES AND CREATURE DESIGN HAVE RECEIVED MUCH MORE ATTENTION THAN IN RIVAL TITLES"

As cute as much of the cast is, there's something deeply disturbing about that dark and vacant stare.


eMag

ROGUE OPS



Nikki comes fully equipped with many of Sam Fisher's acrobatic abilities and battery-powered gadgets.

Sneaking up on enemies doesn't guarantee a stealthy kill – a tricky combo still stands in your way.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, GameCube
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Kemco
DEVELOPER: Bits Studios
RELEASE: 6 Feb '04 (US: Out Now)
GENRE: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Leading lady Nikki Connors looks to give Sam Fisher and Solid Snake a run for their money in the stealth stakes.

ANYTHING UBI CAN DO…

After the massive disappointment that was *Die Hard: Vendetta,* we're hoping the next project to come out of UK developer Bits' doors doesn't die harder. Encouragingly though, from what we've seen of forthcoming stealth-'em-up *Rogue Ops* the team is looking to surpass its last effort with a vengeance. Taking a hearty dash of inspiration from the escapades of covert operatives – Sam Fisher in particular – the game sports a collage of gameplay features from some of the genre's top titles, albeit replacing the traditionally rugged male lead with a voluptuous femme fatale. Working as an assassin for a secret government organisation, ex-Green Beret Nikki Connors is out to prove anything Solid Snake can do, she can do to a fairly reasonable standard as well.

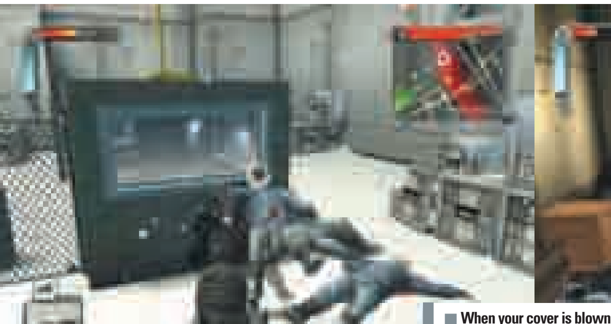
Aside from her quest to join Cate Archer and Joanna Dark in gaming's leading-lady hall of fame, our heroine is also driven by a darker personal agenda to avenge the deaths of her husband and daughter who were victims of an attack by terrorist outfit Omega 19. Following a two year Nikita-esque training programme in the art of silent execution, Ms Connors is now the government's ultimate weapon in the war against terror. Expect plenty of lurking in the shadows, acrobatic pipe-shimmying and concealing the bodies of your prey in lockers as you attempt to tiptoe through the game's eight lengthy missions with as little conflict as possible.

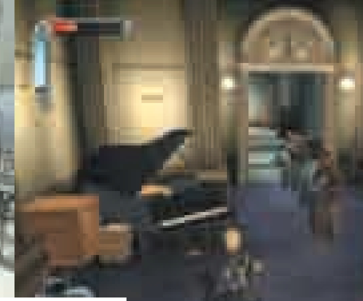
> "ROGUE OPS SPORTS A COLLAGE OF GAMEPLAY FEATURES FROM THE GENRE'S TOP TITLES"

Yet along with its lengthy list of borrowed ideas *Rogue Ops* does have a few original concepts of its own. Perhaps most notable is the elaborate 'death move' system, which requires players to execute specified combos in order to pull off the kill cleanly – the complexity of which decreases depending on how well positioned you get behind your target. The control scheme has also been made more intuitive than the genre is used to, trading intricate button configurations for a single context-specific action icon.

It might not possess the innovation and polish that made the likes of *Splinter Cell* and *Hitman* such landmark titles, but with their respective sequels still some way off *Rogue Ops* could offer a decent change of scenery in the meantime.







When your cover is blown you'll have to rely on good old-fashioned violence to win the day.


eMag

HEADHUNTER: REDEMPTION



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ONE MORE TIME FOR THE WADE MASSIVE…

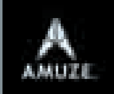
HEADHUNTER + NEW WORLD ORDER x EXPERIENCE = HEADHUNTER: REDEMPTION

"[THIS] BRINGS CINEMATIC QUALITIES TO THE GAMES MARKET WITH ITS ORIGINAL STORYLINE AND DEVELOPED CHARACTER DESIGN"

MATHEW QUAECK, EUROPEAN PRODUCT MANAGER, SEGA EUROPE

■ Keeping your head down is one of the ways you'll survive long enough to find out who's behind this latest conspiracy.

■ The scale in many levels is pretty impressive. See those walkways? You can get up there later…

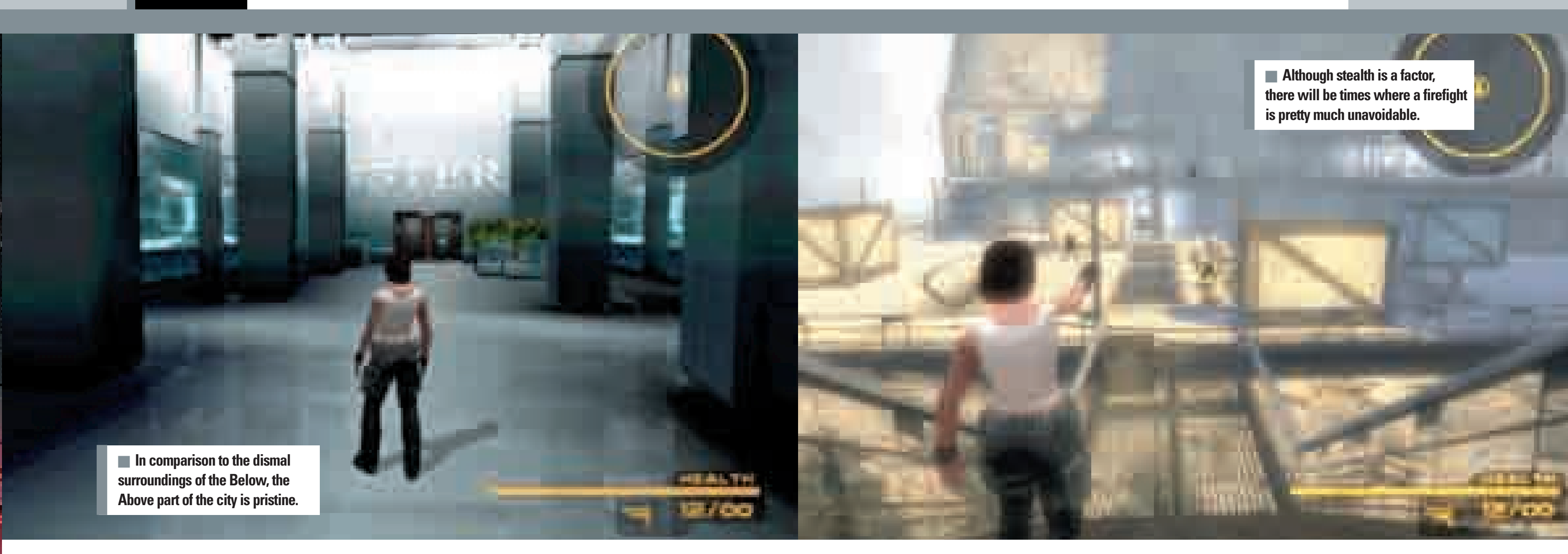


DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Founded in 1996 by John Kroknes and Stefan Holmqvist (who between them share a background in console development since the early Nineties), Amuze is a moderately-sized developer based in Stockholm that's intent on producing quality games. To date, the company has worked purely on the *Headhunter* series.

HISTORY

■ **HEADHUNTER** 2002 (PlayStation2)
■ **HEADHUNTER** 2001 (Dreamcast)



■ In comparison to the dismal surroundings of the Below, the Above part of the city is pristine.

■ Although stealth is a factor, there will be times where a firefight is pretty much unavoidable.

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED, HUNT, HUNT AGAIN

PS2 **Not that it will change most gamers' perceptions of the series, but we thought the original *Headhunter* (specifically the Dreamcast version) was somewhat underrated.** Compared rather unfairly to the *Metal Gear Solid* series – particularly as the Dreamcast version came out several months before *Sons Of Liberty* on the PlayStation2 – it was a decent enough indication of how the stealth genre was going to evolve, even if it did get lost after the death of SEGA's console. But the fact that *Headhunter* didn't do nearly as well as it probably deserved hasn't prevented SEGA (and developer Amuze) from trying again with a sequel, although you have to wonder whether the stealth genre hasn't evolved far beyond where the last game was two years ago.

Set 20 years after *Headhunter*'s plot left us hanging on a virus-infected knife edge, it seems things have gone horribly wrong. The release of the Bloody Mary virus has destroyed the fairly recognisable world of the original game, leaving the door open for a new world order to rise up out of the ashes… and so on. Not that this means much to veteran Headhunter Jack Wade, of course – he's still busy riding his shiny motorbike, popping caps in all kinds of criminal asses and generally protecting the lives of the oblivious masses. Indeed, the only real difference in Jack's everyday life appears to be that he's ditched his original sidekick-cum-wife Angela Stern for new girl Leeza X – supposedly a streetwise girl from the wrong side of the tracks, which would explain her stupid name.

Short of the new plot though (which encompasses everything from arms smuggling, impending world disaster and something much more sinister than a simple human threat), it appears that many of the ideas from the original game are still intact. The unchecked consumerism and mind-controlling mass media of the 'Above' world still smack of *Robocop*'s tongue-in-cheek humour, while Jack's gruff 'take it or leave it' attitude is in evidence throughout. It's all very similar on the gameplay front too, offering a healthy combination of stealth-based movement and all-out blasting when things get tough, although from what we can tell you'll spend much of your time in control of Leeza X rather than Jack.

While this doesn't affect the gameplay in any adverse way, it does open up several new avenues of opportunity thanks to Leeza's built-in scanning abilities. Acting as a means of unlocking doors, hacking through security and viewing the on-screen map, it also allows Leeza other advantages such as being able to scan scenery and detect weakness. Walls, for instance, can be analysed and then destroyed if they prove to be structurally unsound, revealing new routes through levels or other means of making progress. Simplistic puzzle solving it may be, but then we've never really had a problem with that.

Sticking closely to the proven mechanics of the original, *Headhunter: Redemption* is looking fairly decent at this stage, despite being dogged by delays and development issues. That said, we can't help feel that basing a new title on a two-year-old game that didn't do that well in the first place isn't the smartest move ever – if only because games like *Splinter Cell* and *Hidden & Dangerous 2* have shown just how far the stealth action genre has come. Hopefully, Amuze will realise this as well and ensure that *Headhunter: Redemption* has what it takes to make it where its predecessor failed.

"THIS GAME APPEARS TO HAVE MORE ACTION THAN MOST STEALTH TITLES, ALLOWING IT TO CARVE A NICHE IN THE GENRE"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2, Xbox
ORIGIN: Sweden
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: Amuze
RELEASE: Q2 '04
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ Jack Wade's back for more third-person action and adventure, along with a new female companion. But has the genre moved on without him?

ABOVE THE BELOW

Just as we've seen in games like *Skies Of Arcadia* and *Final Fantasy VII*, the world of *Headhunter: Redemption* is split into two distinct regions – Above and Below. Not surprisingly, the two couldn't be any more different if they tried and represent a class war of extreme proportions; the poor live in overcrowded slums buried deep beneath the earth, while the wealthy reap the benefits of staying above ground and revel in decadence. The shift in graphical style is something that the game handles particularly well through the use of soft focus and the scale of the scenery, though how important that'll prove to be in the finished product remains to be seen.

RICHARD BURNS RALLY



Tracks are more authentically narrow than in most games and come riddled with ruts and potholes.

IF REALISM'S WORTH DOING, IT'S WORTH DOING WELL

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: Sweden
PUBLISHER: SCi
DEVELOPER: Warthog
RELEASE: Q2 '04
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-8

The man who stole McRae's crown vies for a repeat performance away from the track with this super-realistic rally sim.

"STEERING MAY WELL TURN THE AXLE BUT BY NO MEANS GUARANTEES THE CAR ITSELF WILL FOLLOW SUIT"

Colin McRae may well be the biggest name on the videogame rally circuit, but in the real world times have changed and Englishman Richard Burns has been the top Brit in the world rankings for the last three years. Now the 2001 World Rally Champion is similarly hoping to surpass the achievements of McRae away from the track by endorsing his own rally simulation game, currently under development at Warthog Sweden. Keen to ensure the title will be impressive enough to give the established *McRae* series a run for its money, Burns has been heavily involved in the development process, with a qualified rally instructor enlisted to fine-tune the handling dynamics to ensure a completely authentic feel is achieved.

Okay, so that's the line every driving sim seems to be spinning these days, but having sampled the game's ground-breaking physics system we can see why SCi is claiming *Richard Burns Rally* showcases a level of realism never before achieved. Intricate physics for each of the car's four points of contact with the road provide an unforgiving simulation of handling behaviour, while the vehicle models have been meticulously mapped to manufacturers' blueprints. Damage to any of the inner workings has precisely the effect on performance it would in reality and will also take time to repair, forcing you to live with any serious problems for the duration of a championship stage.

Attractive as all this attention to detail may be, the unflinching realism means you can expect to spend a substantial amount of your early time with the game amongst the finely rendered undergrowth. Anything more than a timid tap of the accelerator is a sure-fire recipe for disaster, while steering may well turn the axle but by no means guarantees the car itself will follow suit. Thankfully, the finished game will feature a fully animated 3D crowd who will readily leap to the rescue of a flipped vehicle and roll you back onto the track, and a comprehensive Rally School does its best to prepare players for life in the fast lane by revealing such real-life tricks of the trade as the invaluable Scandinavian Flick…



The photo-realistic scenery does a sterling job of capturing the essence of each featured country.

Weather isn't predetermined, but will instead be generated based on climate forecasts for each location.


eMag

OLLIE KING

NEW SEGA, NEW GAMES. BUT CAN THIS COMPETE WITH THE COMPANY'S GOLDEN OLDIES?

DETAILS

FORMAT: Arcade
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: Amusement Vision
RELEASE: TBC
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ *Ollie King* lets you go skateboarding in surreal, neon worlds, and as it uses a board controller like *Top Skater*, you'll want to limber up before you start…

Despite having a quiet period as far as new releases go, SEGA has somehow managed to make a profit in recent months. The company has been doing a lot of streamlining since the demise of the Dreamcast, and it looks as if all the vigorous restructuring is starting to pay off. Of course, the company also needs quality games if it's ever going to achieve the level of success it did during the 16-bit era, and while *Ollie King* is unlikely to set the world alight, it's nice to see an original title on the way.

The first thing that hits you about the game is the stylish Chihiro arcade cabinet, which features a mounted skateboard and safety surround. Painted bright yellow and black, the machine illustrates perfectly what kind of game you can expect – something garish, over-the-top, and really rather quirky. The skateboard method of control makes for an unusual experience too, and although it's not really that far removed from *Top Skater* or *Air Trix* (two earlier SEGA games that used the same technology), it's refreshing to see a new arcade game that doesn't revolve around dancing or shooting.

Rather than try to simulate realism and street culture like most recent skateboarding games, Amusement Vision is striving to deliver something a little more abstract here. The cel-shaded characters and many of the background details are reminiscent of *Jet Set Radio*, while the overlaying effects are not dissimilar to *Rez*. Apparently, SEGA's designers decided to take this approach with the game because they wanted to create a sense of living graffiti – something they have achieved with aplomb. Unfortunately, while the overall effect is certainly striking, we suspect that the visual style may not appeal to everyone. Let's not forget that *Jet Set Radio Future* on the Xbox was similarly impressive, but its cel-shaded graphics failed to attract that many gamers.

Aside from the visuals, the objective of *Ollie King* is purely to win races against other boarders while making the most of the various trick and stunt opportunities that arise along the way. In fact, the trick segment of the gameplay is a lot more integral to winning than you might think. By successfully performing one of the 12 tricks on offer, you're rewarded with a temporary speed boost that's highlighted with any number of flashy, though slightly off-putting, special effects. Of course, after a while you become accustomed to these epilepsy-inducing explosions of colour and can enjoy wowing the crowds with some of the most extreme stunts we've seen in a while. And for anyone who can't get to grips with the controls, there's even a kids mode to make things a little easier.

Although *Ollie King* is hardly genre-defining in the way that *SEGA Rally* or *Virtua Fighter* were, it looks set to be another fun title in SEGA's ever-growing catalogue of arcade games. Running on the relatively inexpensive Chihiro arcade board and reusing existing skateboard technology, there's no reason why the game shouldn't generate a profit for SEGA. While recent ventures such as *Derby Owner's Club* have certainly been impressive, the company still has to be cautious with its spending. Seeing as skateboarding continues to be such a popular pastime, it will be interesting to see just how well-received the finished game will be.

SMILE VISION

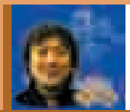
Under SEGA's recent restructuring, development on *Ollie King* was shifted from Smilebit to Amusement Vision. Many employees have been switched from one team to another, and while Amusement Vision is experienced with GameCube technology, Smilebit is undeniably gifted when it comes to developing for the PC and Xbox. By moving people around, each division should be able to produce titles for multiple formats simultaneously. But don't expect to see *Ollie King* on consoles any time soon; with much of the gaming experience relying on the skateboard controller, it would be difficult for the game to work in the home.

> "PAINTED BRIGHT YELLOW AND BLACK, THE MACHINE LETS YOU KNOW WHAT KIND OF GAME YOU CAN EXPECT – SOMETHING GARISH, OVER-THE-TOP AND QUIRKY"



■ It's kind of hard to skate on grass and gravel in real life. But then *Ollie King* is nothing like real life.

■ Although they're exaggerated, some of the trick opportunities aren't unlike those in real skate parks.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Amusement Vision has become one of SEGA's most respected divisions in recent years, thanks mostly to GameCube projects such as *F-Zero* and *Monkey Ball*. With Toshihiro Nagoshi, the man behind *Daytona USA*, at the helm, it's no real surprise that the company should be capable of producing so many eye-catching games.

HISTORY

■ **F-ZERO GX** 2003 [GameCube]
■ **SUPER MONKEY BALL 2** 2002 [GameCube]
■ **SUPER MONKEY BALL** 2001 [GameCube]

■ Although the theme should appeal to Western gamers, much of the imagery has a decidedly Eastern flavour to it.

"IT'S REFRESHING TO SEE A NEW ARCADE GAME THAT DOESN'T REVOLVE AROUND DANCING OR SHOOTING"

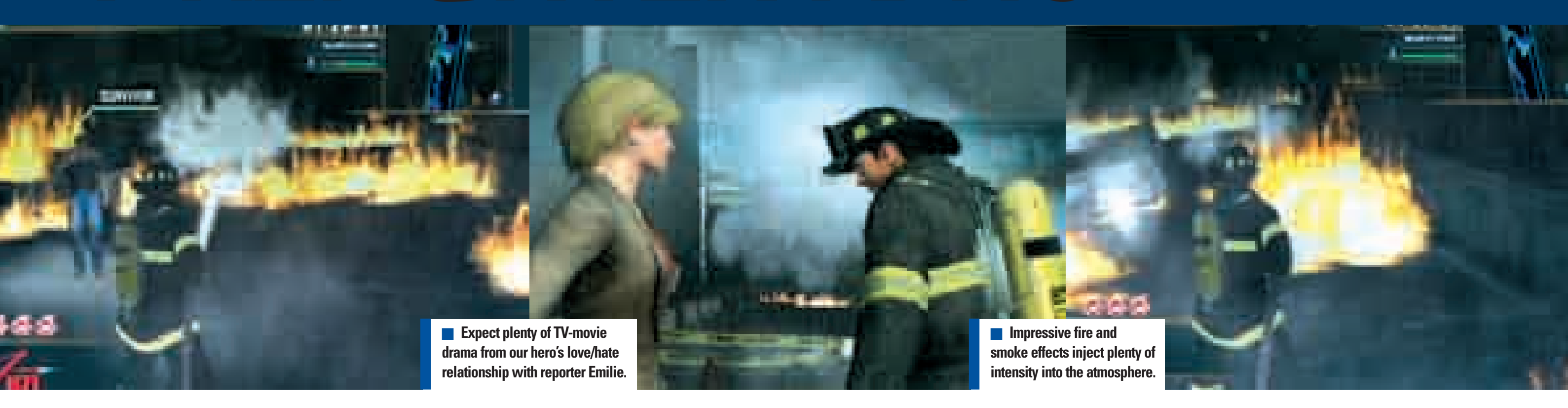
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

OLLIE OLLIE OXEN FREE

JET SET RADIO + TOP SKATER x REZ = OLLIE KING

■ With elements of *Jet Set Radio*, *Rez* and *Sonic*, *Ollie King* should please SEGA's hardcore fans.

FIREFIGHTER FD:18



Expect plenty of TV-movie drama from our hero's love/hate relationship with reporter Emilie.

Impressive fire and smoke effects inject plenty of intensity into the atmosphere.

STEP ASIDE FIREMAN SAM, THERE'S A NEW HERO IN TOWN

They dedicate their lives to saving others from peril, stand up to whatever nature's most devastating forces can throw at them, and have a power over women that would turn James Bond himself green with envy. When they're not getting uppity about the size of their pay packets the fearless members of the fire service have every attribute of the quintessential videogame hero, so why haven't they been used as the inspiration for more action adventure titles in the past? The fact that simply pointing a hose in the direction of a raging fire until the flames subside doesn't make for particularly riveting gameplay is reason enough for us, but that's a perception of the genre Konami appears determined to change with the release of effects-laden extinguish-'em-up *Firefighter FD:18*.

The last couple of additions to the somewhat diminutive line-up of firefighting games have taken the form of RTS affairs that had players tactically manoeuvring their gallant team of hose-masters around the scene of some ferocious infernos, but *FD:18* instead follows the historically less successful route of dropping players right into the heat of the action to tackle the humbling blazes for themselves.

Stepping into the flame-retardant boots of square-jawed hero Dean McGregor, players will be repeatedly forced to put their virtual lives on the line as they attempt to pluck survivors from the grip of some incredibly heated situations. When it becomes clear the epidemic of blazes around the city is the work of a deranged serial arsonist, McGregor and TV news reporter Emilie Arquette find themselves involved in a race against time to put an end to the pyromaniac's trail of destruction.

The action is suitably atmospheric and showcases some fairly impressive fire and smoke effects, while a series of dramatically scripted events keeps players on their toes. Gamers will find themselves relentlessly besieged from all angles by fierce explosions, deadly backdrafts and falling debris, while the more stubborn 'boss' blazes offer a more perilous challenge than your average hose fodder. Yet despite these hazardous events spicing up the inescapably dreary task of clearing a path through the flames, playing through an early level demo extinguished much of the hope we had for game.

Unless the later missions involve substantially more variation on the water-spraying theme, *Firefighter FD:18* may go the way of its predecessors and struggle to ignite the gaming world on its release next year.

"SCRIPTED EVENTS KEEP PLAYERS ON THEIR TOES WITH EXPLOSIONS, BACKDRAFTS AND FALLING DEBRIS"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC '04
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

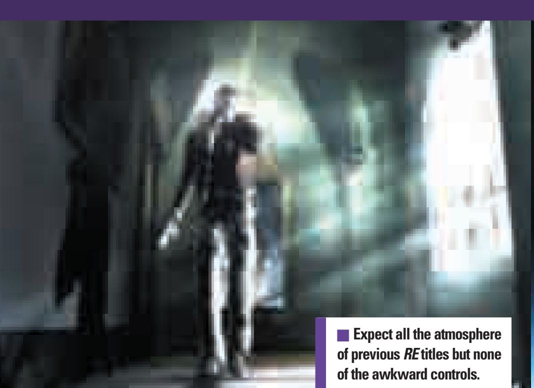
Another rare addition to the firefighting genre, but will Konami's title be the first to set the gaming world ablaze?



With human lives at stake, McGregor must spray his way through the flames as swiftly as possible.


eMag

RESIDENT EVIL 4



Expect all the atmosphere of previous *RE* titles but none of the awkward controls.



THE MASTERS OF THE ORIGINAL HORROR COME BACK FOR MORE…

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Production Studio 4
RELEASE: 2005 (Japan: TBA '04, US: Q4 '04)
GENRE: Survival Horror
PLAYERS: 1

Capcom takes the finest zombie series of the Nineties back to basics and prepares to scare us for what could be the last time.

The survival horror genre is now a part of everyday gaming life, but there was a time when it was an exciting new development; and while Capcom may not have invented the genre it most certainly defined it with *Resident Evil*. Fear, it seems, sells. We'll pay good money to be scared witless, so it's been disappointing to watch the series slowly become more action based. It's obviously been a challenge for Capcom's teams to find innovative ways to make zombies scary, and the result is that other games like *Silent Hill* and *Forbidden Siren* are now leading the way.

With *Resident Evil 4*, though, Capcom is looking to go back to basics. The story follows the path of *RE2*'s Leon S Kennedy; after spending 24 hours in hell, the Raccoon City police officer feels the need to be a hero one last time (which is certainly noble, if a little stupid), so off he trots to catch up with the previous instalments' Claire and Chris Redfield. His journey leads him to the mansion where it all began, the home of the Mother Virus and the Progenitor Virus.

> "SERIES CREATOR SHINJI MIKAMI HAS ACCEPTED THAT ZOMBIES AREN'T SCARY ANY MORE"

Shinji Mikami (daddy of the series) has seemingly accepted that zombies really aren't that frightening any more. We see them at work, we see them at home – today's office-worker society produces them in their thousands – therefore we need something extra to provide an escape from reality. How about a fish hook-wielding creature of darkness that has the ability to morph into a cloud of whispering fog? Don't see those every day now do you?

So the fear factor will be making a reappearance, but one aspect that's bound to strike terror into the hearts of the masses is that archaic control system. Such worries are groundless, however, as the controls will be receiving a thorough overhaul (though there are those who maintain that the slow, clunky system actually heightened the tension). The entire world is fully rendered this time around so cameras can move more freely, and you'll have the option to slip into first-person mode – all of which indicates that the game will handle like a standard 3D adventure. From what we've seen, Leon's torch can be manoeuvred separately, making for a *Luigi's Mansion*-style C-stick control.

Capcom is due to blow the lid on the game in the New Year (even if the release is way off). It can't really wait much longer than that with the competition so hot on its heels…

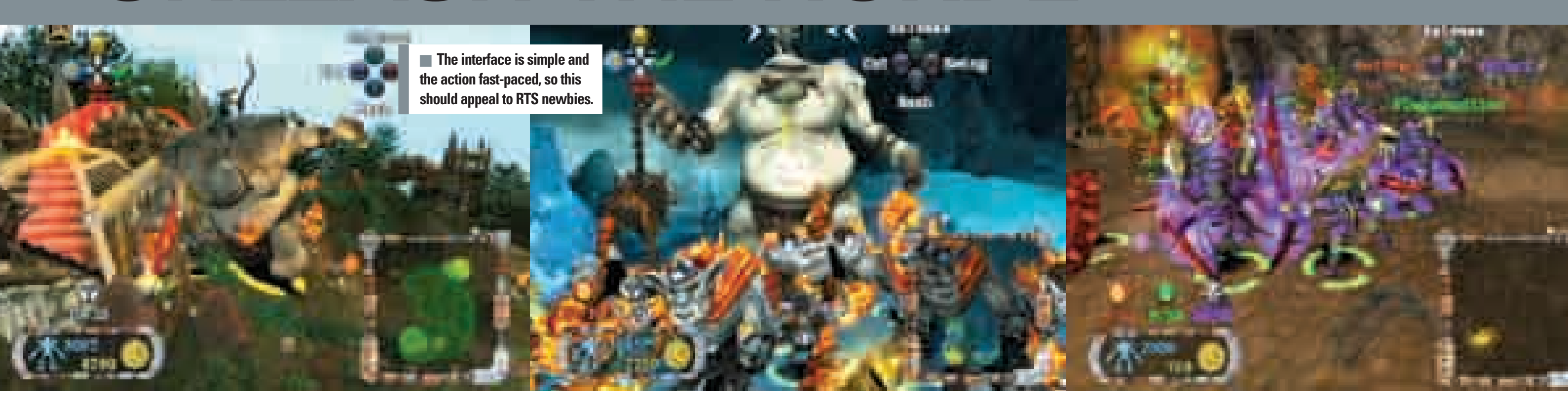


You'll be back in the mansion where it all began, with new enemies to face.

Leon Kennedy – tough, fearless, slightly foppish in a David Bowie kind of way.


eMag

GOBLIN COMMANDER: UNLEASH THE HORDE



■ The interface is simple and the action fast-paced, so this should appeal to RTS newbies.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Jaleco Entertainment
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Feb '04 (US: Out Now)
GENRE: RTS
PLAYERS: 1-2

■ An RTS for the console age, *Goblin Commander* takes a stuffy genre and makes it fun. A mass-market winner?

DOES EXACTLY WHAT IT SAYS ON THE GOBLIN. ER, TIN

If there's one market that's under-developed on home consoles, it has to be real-time strategy. Certainly, there have been several RTS titles brought from PC to console (*Command & Conquer* on the PSone or *Starcraft 64* on the N64, for instance), but there are precious few examples of an RTS game developed specifically for the console gamer. PC-to-console ports of RTS titles often have fiddly controls and limited visuals, so it's time that someone thought of a way round such problems. And that's where *Goblin Commander* could come good.

Created under the expert guidance of ex-Blizzard chaps the Millar brothers, *Goblin Commander* is a different kind of RTS; different because it attempts to dispel the illusion of complexity that often puts people off playing real-time strategy games and create a fun experience into the bargain. While the set-up may sound like something straight out of Games Workshop – as leader of the Stonekrusher goblin clan, it's your task to unite the clans, wage battles across the land of Ogriss and unravel the mystery of your master's disappearance – the game itself is anything but, thanks to its simplicity and ceaseless action.

> "GOBLIN COMMANDER IS ACTUALLY A LOT MORE FUN TO PLAY THAN IT FIRST SOUNDS"

One of the most important things about *Goblin Commander* is that it takes all the plodding elements that bog down PC RTS titles, then refines them until only the vitals are left. The emphasis is on speed and keeping the game moving rather than having to wait ages for troops and buildings to be built or gold and other resources to be collected – everything is meant to be quick and easy. This also goes for controlling your goblins, which can be done by setting waypoints on the map with a single button press or through direct control (at which point, you can zoom the camera in to get a first-hand look at the carnage your troops are causing). The lack of level-building RPG elements also means that it's easier to send your goblins to their deaths without feeling too bad – their expendability is balanced by how simple it is to create more troops, allowing you to be more daring in your approach to each challenge.

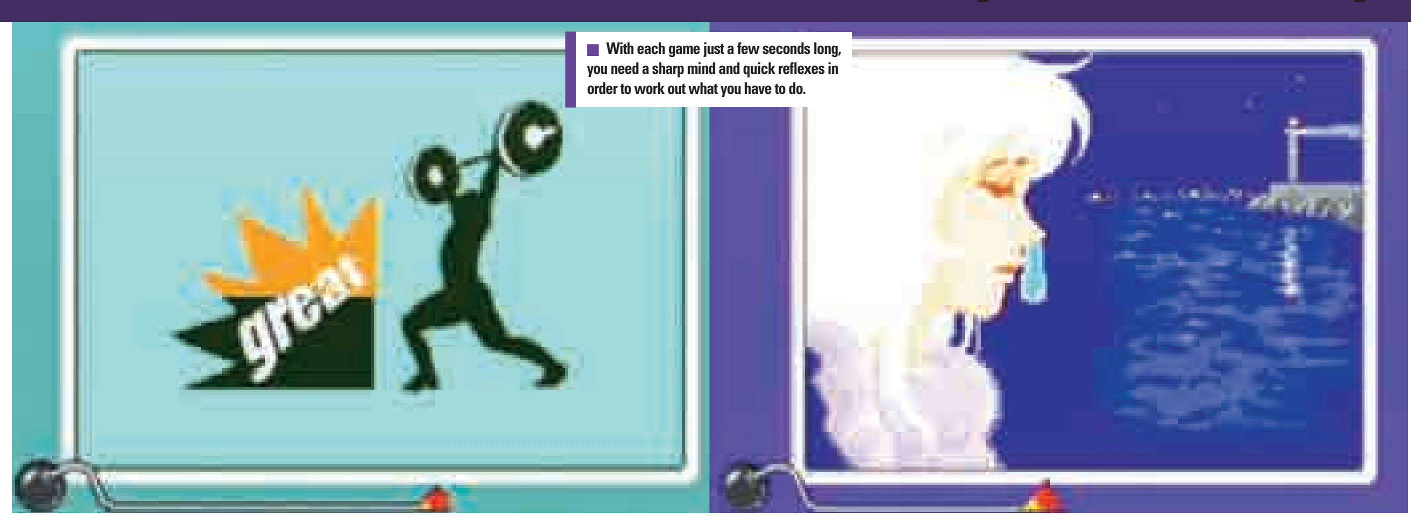
Having played the nearly finished code, we have to admit to being pleasantly surprised by what we've seen of *Goblin Commander*. What could have turned into just another console RTS failure looks to be a game that might blow the genre wide open. Here's hoping the final product can match our expectations.



■ No, wait, come back. This *is* an RTS but it's not dull or anything. Promise.


eMag

WARIO WARE GC [WORKING TITLE]



With each game just a few seconds long, you need a sharp mind and quick reflexes in order to work out what you have to do.

SMALL GAMES FOR A SMALL CONSOLE – IS IT JUST WHAT DR WARIO ORDERED?

DETAILS
FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA '04 (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Party
PLAYERS: 1-4

Yep, this is almost a straight GBA-to-GameCube port of the quickfire title. Isn't that what the Game Boy Player is for?

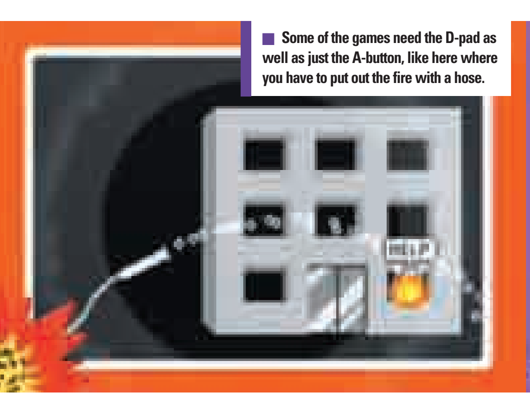
Much as you might be thinking otherwise, we can assure you that your eyes aren't deceiving you – these screenshots really are from the GameCube version of *Wario Ware*. Not that you'd have noticed if we'd printed GBA screens instead. It sounds crazy, but even though Nintendo has created an enhanced version of the GBA game for the GameCube, the presentation (graphics, sound, the whole shebang) remains exactly the same, as do all of the five-second mini-games that make up the title. So we can probably guess what you're thinking: why would you pay £40 for a game you've already got on your GBA? Doubt all you want, but there's no getting away from its charms…

As with many GameCube titles coming straight from Nintendo these days, the emphasis here is purely on the multiplayer aspect as opposed to the single-player game (which, as you may expect, replicates that of the GBA game to a tee). Allowing up to four people to play at once, the game becomes even more frantic as you vie for position amongst your peers – all by successfully completing the many mini-games on offer.

How you go about coming out on top all depends on which multiplayer mode you choose. Audience mode, for example, sees players taking it in turns to play games, with failure causing you to lose your 'viewing' audience until only one player has anyone left watching. There's also an Othello-style challenge where counters are awarded to players who can get through a series of mini-games in one piece, and even a mode where competing players can sabotage each other's chances by obscuring parts of the screen with their inflated bodies. Sensible it isn't, but then it wouldn't be *Wario Ware* if it was.

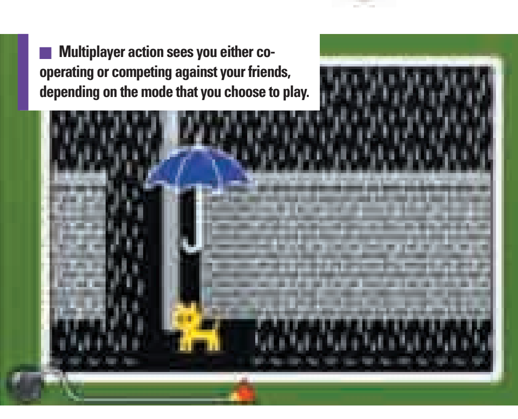
Unfortunately, the big snag we can see is that this transition of *Wario Ware* to the Cube is the second GBA-to-GC conversion on the way (*Zelda: Four Swords* being the other), and while it's certainly an enjoyable game in small doses, we have to wonder whether this approach is one that's going to pay off for Nintendo in the long run. We're used to waiting ages for quality titles from the Kyoto giant (though others may complain about it), so seeing the gaps in the release schedule plugged with hasty rehashes like this breaks our little hearts, if only because it will fuel the anti-GameCube fire.

"PAYING £40 FOR A GAME YOU'VE ALREADY GOT MIGHT SOUND DAFT, BUT THERE'S NO ESCAPING ITS CHARM"



Some of the games need the D-pad as well as just the A-button, like here where you have to put out the fire with a hose.





Multiplayer action sees you either co-operating or competing against your friends, depending on the mode that you choose to play.


eMag

GANGLAND



The bustling 3D maps can be zoomed, panned and rotated to your heart's content.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SO MANY PIES, NOT ENOUGH FINGERS

GANGSTERS + MAFIA x MULTI-TASKING = GANGLAND

"NO TWO GAMES ARE THE SAME THANKS TO AN 'EVENT ENGINE' THAT GENERATES NON-LINEAR PLOT LINES"

WHIPTAIL INTERACTIVE PRESS RELEASE

DEVELOPER PROFILE

Based in Copenhagen, Denmark, the MediaMobsters team started out by creating board games for the Nordic market – the first of which was mafia-themed title Don. Six games and two Game of the Year awards later a small team of programmers and artists began work on ambitious PC strategy debut *Gangland*.

HISTORY

GANGLAND IS THE FIRST VIDEOGAME TO BE DEVELOPED BY MEDIAMOBSTERS



Taking on your rivals can be a messy affair, but shrewd use of cover will improve your chances in a firefight.

Letting your wife and kid wander the streets alone is asking for trouble in the form of a rival hit squad.

F*%# PLAYER 2, AND PLAYERS 3 AND 4… I BURY THE COCK-A-ROACHES

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Denmark
PUBLISHER: Whiptail Interactive
DEVELOPER: MediaMobsters
RELEASE: 14 Feb '04
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-8

Build a thriving crime syndicate from scratch and take on your rivals in a chess match of resource management.

If there really is no such thing as bad publicity, then Whiptail Interactive should be overjoyed at the ripples still emanating from the controversial garbage that was *Postal 2*. Yet if what we've seen of genre-blurring mafia epic *Gangland* is anything to go by, the rookie publisher could be about to make an even bigger splash in the industry – this time for all the right reasons.

Although the forthcoming debut from MediaMobsters has more than a faint whiff of Eidos' *Gangsters* series about it, the Danish outfit is promising to deliver an infinitely more involving and complex simulation of life in the shoes of a mafia Don. The single-player story follows a Sicilian Mafioso attempting to create a powerful crime syndicate to take down his three traitorous brothers responsible for the murder of their Mob-boss father. Going to work for his uncle, vengeful hero Mario must undertake a series of preparatory errands before overthrowing his makeshift mentor and taking the reins of the organisation himself. As with most RTS-style affairs, however, the Campaign mode's bite-sized missions ultimately take a back seat to the epic standalone scenarios that will see players building an all-conquering crime empire from the ground up.

The action is staged around various sectors of the colossal Paradise City, but don't go thinking the grass is green and the girls are pretty in this crime-ridden den of low-lives. The game world is brought to life by an impressive 3D engine capable of managing individual AI routines for up to a thousand citizens at any one time, while fully simulated day/night cycles dictate the flow of activity around the city streets. Maps will accommodate up to eight human or computer-controlled kingpins each vying for control of Paradise City's criminal underworld, yet while these rival factions' destinies are ultimately on a rather messy collision course, *Gangland* sets itself apart from the standard RTS gameplay model with the unique freeform journey each player will experience prior to becoming a formidable force in the city.

The much-hyped 'event engine' ensures this experience is vastly different every time, as the missions you're offered will be randomly generated. The main way to recruit staff is to accept work from the major international mobs, as success will furnish your gang with one of 12 special units. Each unit type has a number of unique talents at its disposal and is also particularly effective at countering the special skills of certain other units. For instance, placing bouncer units outside your establishments will protect them from covert operatives like ninjas, bombers and infiltrators who can otherwise trespass behind your defences. Along with personnel, you'll also want to expand your organisation's business activities to cover the usual mob-related portfolio of restaurants, gun stores and speakeasies – each disguising a number of more illicit operations like brothels and gambling dens.

When the action does erupt a dynamic combat system lets your units make full use of the shelter offered by objects in the 3D environment, avoiding the traditional 'stand and shoot' RTS unit behaviour. With such an open-ended platter of businesses, sub-missions and possible recruits on offer, along with a host of other incidental factors to contend with, our fingers are crossed in the hope this RTS/RPG/management sim hybrid can live up to its immense potential.

'TIL DEATH DO US PART

Along with procuring the services of special units from the international mobs and buying the support of standard units, three essential additions to your gang can only come from expanding your family. Potential mates can be found strutting around Paradise City, but don't expect them to mother your children until you toss them a pricey engagement ring and church ceremony. You'll need to surround your spouse with bodyguards to prevent enemy factions picking her off – at least until she's sired a money-spinning lawyer or tough enforcer son, or an irresistible seductress daughter.

"THE 3D ENGINE IS CAPABLE OF MANAGING INDIVIDUAL AI ROUTINES FOR UP TO A THOUSAND CITIZENS AT ONCE"

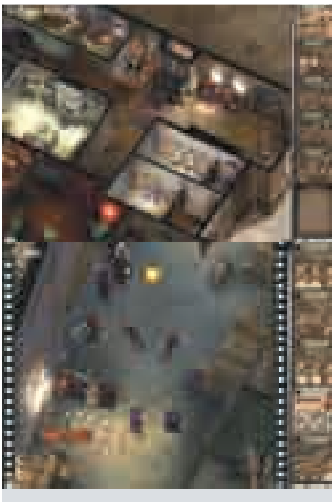
SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

CHICAGO 1930

KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

Format: PC
Origin: Germany
Publisher: Wanadoo
Developer: Spellbound
Release: Q1 '04
Genre: Strategy/Action
Players: 1



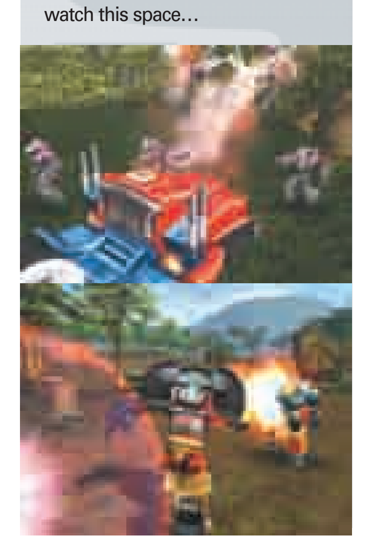
The German developer behind unlikely RTS titles *Robin Hood: The Legend Of Sherwood* and *Desperados: Wanted Dead Or Alive* is back with yet another isometric tactical action game. This time set against the backdrop of prohibition-era Chicago, players can take the role of either the Mafia or FBI and face appropriately contrasting campaigns to take control of the city by undertaking a series of real-time missions. Don't go expecting the visual calibre or polished AI of the *Commandos* series, but with its basic level-up system, diverse campaigns and a handy slow-motion effect for when the action gets frantic, *Chicago 1930* certainly showcases some impressive ideas.

TRANSFORMERS ARMADA: PRELUDE TO ENERGON

ROBOTS IN DISGUISE

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Australia
Publisher: Atari
Developer: In-House
Release: Q2 '04
Genre: Action
Players: 1

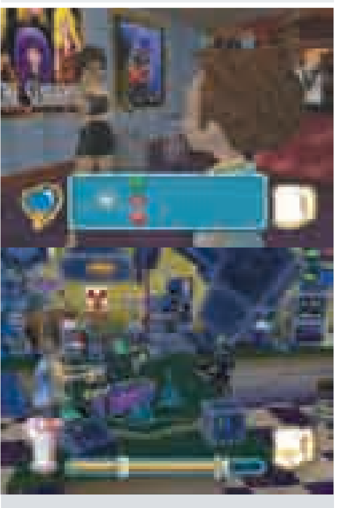
Following the recent resurrection of the *Transformers* TV series, Atari is bringing the adventures of Optimus Prime and co. to the PS2. Although the action will be based on the updated *Armada* series rather than the classic Eighties show, with the full line-up of Autobots at your disposal there should still be ample opportunity for reliving childhood fantasies. The story revolves around a shipload of hugely powerful Mini-cons that have remained hidden for millions of years until a group of kids stumble upon the destructive devices, sparking a desperate race to prevent them falling into the evil clutches of Megatron and the Decepticons. Nostalgia fans should watch this space…



LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE

A CUMMING-OF-AGE DRAMA

Format: PlayStation2, Xbox, PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: High Voltage
Release: Q3 '04
Genre: Adventure
Players: 1



Since 1987 the *Leisure Suit Larry* series has managed to shift a remarkable 35 million units. But after seven libido-fuelled adventures lovable loser Larry Laffer has handed over his book of seedy chat-up lines to his nephew, Larry Lovage. In a distinct change of direction for the franchise, players will follow the misadventures of sexually incompetent college student Lovage as he goes out of his way to get laid – with 'hilarious' consequences. The game will feature all-new 3D visuals and a sense of humour inspired by such gross-out movies as *American Pie* and *There's Something About Mary*, as Larry's advances towards the opposite sex go horribly wrong.

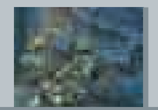
EVERQUEST II

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Sony Online
Release: Q2 '04
Genre: MMORPG
Players: Massively Multiplayer

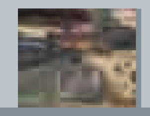
After numerous expansions to the original *EverQuest* formula, fans of the life-consuming online RPG are finally being treated to a fully fledged sequel. The game's popularity exceeded Sony's expectations, yet the cutting-edge visuals of 1999 are now looking somewhat the worse for wear. Keen to ensure *EverQuest II* retains its good looks for many years to come, Sony has lavished the highest calibre of graphics on the new game universe. Set 500 years after the last game, players will be able to embark on their boundless adventures around the new-look world of Narrath as a fully customised character based on the 16 races and 48 available classes.





DELAYED – UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004 (PC)

■ Fans of Epic's online shooter who had hoped to spend their Christmas holidays exploring *UT2004*'s all-new arenas will now have to wait until February before their trigger finger gets another workout.



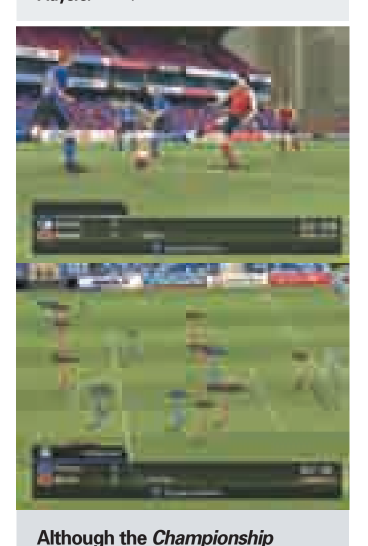
DELAYED – SEGA GT ONLINE (XBOX)

■ Just as it was about to go head to head with *Project Gotham Racing 2* in the Christmas rush, SEGA's Xbox-only racer pulled an unexpected u-turn and will now get the green light in February.

LMA MANAGER 2004

THE RACE FOR SECOND PLACE

Format: PS2, Xbox
Origin: UK
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: In-House
Release: Q1 '04
Genre: Sports Management
Players: 1



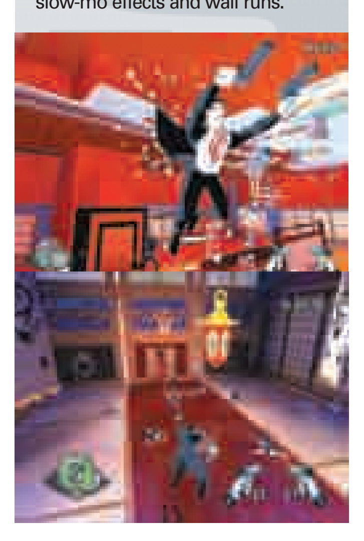
Although the *Championship Manager* series remains undisputed king of footy management sims on the PC, a clear-cut contender has yet to emerge on the consoles. With a complete visual overhaul and hearty dose of added depth in just about every department, Codemasters is hoping to elevate its *LMA Manager* franchise to new heights. An improved 3D match engine looks set to deliver a much more entertaining spectacle on the pitch, while more detailed training, scouting and tactical interfaces flesh out the action behind the scenes. You can even take control of a fantasy team you've put together yourself if none of the real-world clubs take your fancy.

DRAKE

MORE COMIC-STRIP CAPERS

Format: Xbox, PC
Origin: Sweden
Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Idol FX
Release: Q1 '04
Genre: Action
Players: 1

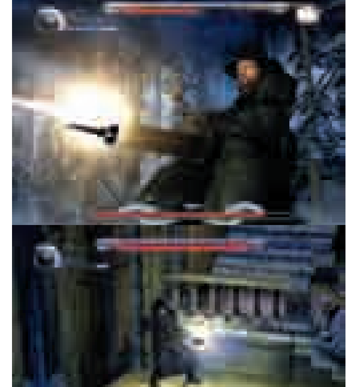
Multi-talented developer and comic-book creator Idol FX is bringing the adventures of supernatural avenger Drake to the Xbox and PC in an explosive cel-shaded action title. Recreating the slick artistic style of the comic strip, the story will follow resurrected hero Drake in his quest for vengeance against those who murdered his gang. At the same time, he'll be racing to recover a dangerous ancient artefact that has the power to raise the dead and trap the souls of the living. Jumping into battle wielding two weapons at a time, players will experience a blend of fast-paced blasting, acrobatic martial arts and supernatural abilities spiced up by some *Matrix*-esque slow-mo effects and wall runs.



VAN HELSING

DOING THE MONSTER MASH

Format: PlayStation2/Xbox
Origin: US
Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Saffire Studios
Release: Q2 '04
Genre: Action/Adventure
Players: 1



To coincide with the May 2004 release of Universal Pictures' horror flick *Van Helsing*, Vivendi is serving up an interactive piece of vampire-slaying action with a third-person console title of the same name. Set in the heart of Transylvania, the game unfolds pretty much as you'd expect: help Bram Stoker's famous monster-hunter track down the evil that's threatening the land and drive a stake straight through its heart, all in glorious 3D. But along with an all-action face-off with the dark prince himself, players can also look forward to meeting a host of other gruesome characters from the Universal Pictures back catalogue, including the Wolf Man, Igor and even Frankenstein's Monster…

POOL PARADISE

POOL BY THE POOL

Format: PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Ignition
Developer: Awesome Studios
Release: Q2 '04
Genre: Sports
Players: TBA

Since the early Nineties, Archer Maclean's portfolio of pool and snooker games have dominated the genre, but despite taking the concept about as far as it can go, Maclean and his team are racking 'em up for one last time with *Pool Paradise*. Teaming up with grannies' favourite Jimmy White for a fourth time, this will be the first next-gen outing for the *Maclean* franchise and promises to be by far the most visually appealing simulation of the sport to date. Set on a picturesque South Pacific island, day and night cycles will show off real-time reflections and shadows in all their glory, while the selection of mini-games will include a cabinet of Maclean's arcade classic *Dropzone*.




OUT 3

Good as gold but stupid as mud, they'll carry on regardless **Lemmings PC [Psygnosis] 1991**


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November 02
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May 03
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Issue five

THAT WAS THE YEAR THAT WAS

TWELVE MONTHS OF GAMING – THAT'S A LOT OF VERY SORE THUMBS…

Doesn't time fly when you're having fun? It certainly doesn't seem like over a year since the first issue of **games™** hit the shelves, especially since we've worked flat out since then to keep the magazine filled with as much gaming goodness as you need every month. It's been a struggle sometimes – not least during those long summer months when it seemed like there was nothing worth playing – but we can't say that we haven't enjoyed it.

Quiet periods or not, there's been more than enough going on for us to cover – what with all the quality (or even not-so-quality) releases, big build-ups and numerous happenings throughout the industry, although not all of them have been as positive as we might have liked.

So with the New Year here and the prospect of another eventful 12 months ahead of us, now would be a good time to reflect on past events – if only so we can try and learn from our mistakes, or at least predict who's going to be making them in the future. Not that we're the types to point fingers… really, we're not.



July 03

April 03

Issue twelve
October 03

Issue seven
June 03

Issue nine
August 03

Issue thirteen
November 03

Issue eleven
October 02

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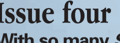
Issue two

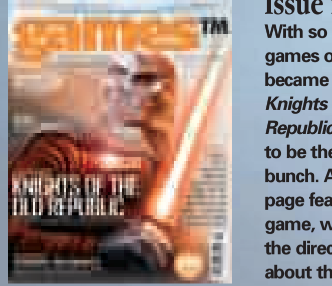
As Capcom's remake of *Resident Evil* was so stunning on GameCube, it really wasn't surprising that we chose to put the prequel, *Resident Evil Zero,* on the cover of issue 2. And with a preview of *Resident Evil Outbreak* this issue was a real treat for survival horror fans.



Issue three

After so much excitement over *Resident Evil* in issue 2, we decided to turn our attention to another of Capcom's superb franchises. Sadly, when we finally received the finished code for *Devil May Cry 2* in time for issue 4, we were all horribly disappointed.





Issue four

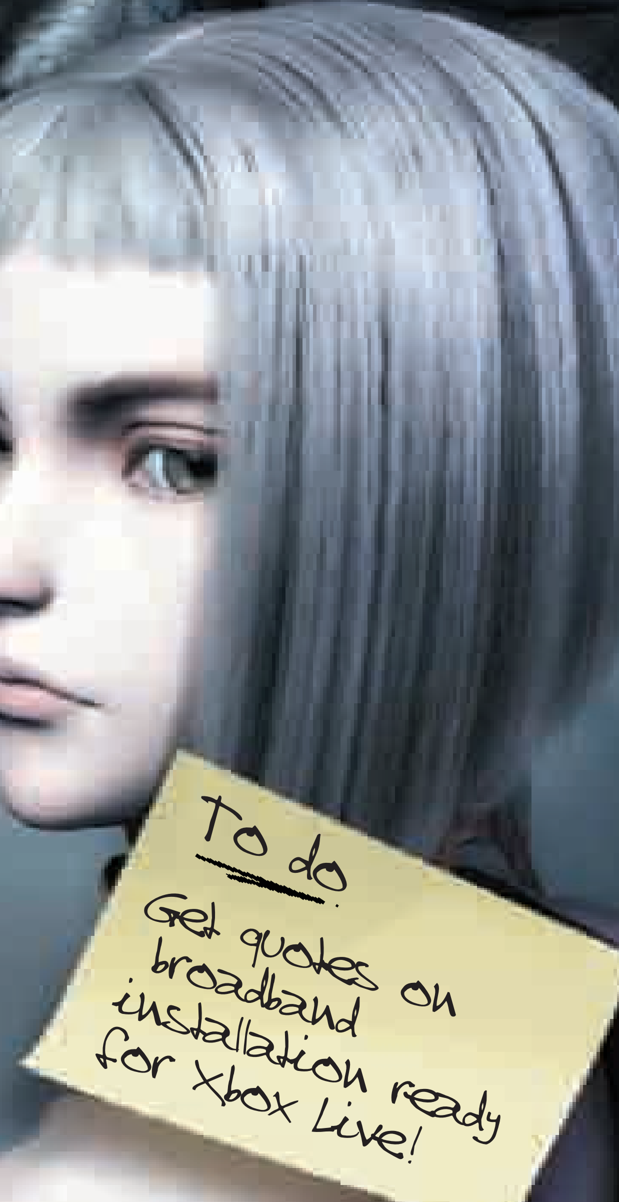
With so many *Star Wars* games on the horizon, it became apparent that *Knights Of The Old Republic* was shaping up to be the best of the bunch. As well as a four-page feature on the game, we also spoke to the directors of BioWare about their work.



Pan er Dragoon Orta

Xbox March 03

SEGA's Team Andromeda may be long gone, but its spirit lives on in the form of *Panzer Dragoon Orta* on Xbox



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

With Xbox and GameCube having just enjoyed their first Christmas in Europe, the first quarter of 2003 was a time of learning for Microsoft. While the Xbox boasted a healthy selection of decent titles at its launch, exclusive games during the latter half of 2002 had started to dry up. Despite beautifully crafted titles such as *Panzer Dragoon Orta* arriving exclusively for the system during the first quarter of 2003, an avalanche of quality GameCube products, along with the launch of the Game Boy Advance SP, saw Microsoft being upstaged by Nintendo. Even the launch of the company's much-talked-about online gaming service, Xbox Live, turned out to be something of a non-event – especially seeing as there were few decent network games available from day one. Sony, meanwhile, was getting on with business as usual and, despite a lack of decent software, was pretty much unaffected by Microsoft and Nintendo's efforts.

20 January

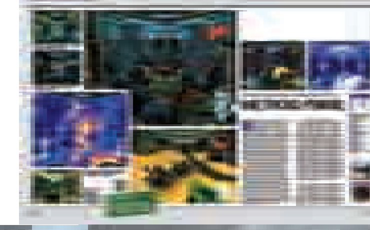
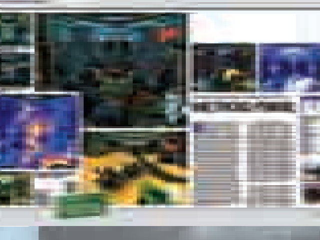
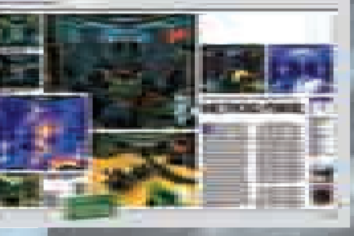
What is The Phantom?

Florida-based company Infinium Labs announced a PC-based console called the Phantom. The industry was confused – could this machine be a hoax?

28 January

Metroid Prime, Issue 2
Final Verdict 10/10

"It's obvious from the start that the graphics and sound are beyond anything on the console, but it's the in-depth gameplay that'll have you utterly hooked"

05 February

N-Gage out of the bag

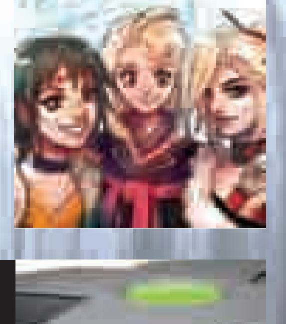
Back in February Nokia unveiled the N-Gage at events in London and Sydney. Interestingly, no price structure was discussed. We wonder why.



13 February

Square get-together...

After months of speculation, the Square Enix merger was approved by both firms' shareholders. The unified company would formally launch on 1 April.



18 February

Pre-order Wind Waker

Nintendo broke the habit of a lifetime when it announced that European gamers would get a bonus disc with *The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker*. We felt special.

21 February

Miyamoto-san here!

Nintendo's god-like Shigeru Miyamoto (creator of Mario, Zelda and Pikmin) came to England to promote his two new Zelda games, *A Link To The Past* and *The Wind Waker*.

14 March

Xbox Live on sale today

Microsoft celebrated the Xbox's first birthday by launching Xbox Live in Europe. At just £49.99 for a year's subscription, the pack also included a headset and demo copies of *Mech Assault*, *Whacked* and *Moto GP*. Despite a slow first few months, Live has since become the leading console network gaming service.



21 March

Panzer Dragoon Orta, Issue 3
Final Verdict 9/10

"A remarkable combination of solid gameplay and graphics engineering that mixes the pure playability of a retro title with the technology of today"

28 March

Don't forget to buy a GBA SP!

Despite its versatile architecture, the Game Boy Advance had a very dark screen, making many games hard to play. But from 28 March, gamers could get their hands on the much more stylish GBA SP, complete with an illuminated screen. The new look appears to have been a shrewd move by Nintendo to appeal to a more adult audience – the PDA stylings have helped to shift over two million Game Boy Advance SPs in Europe alone.




29 March

Trip to Elixir Studios to check out Republic

31 March

Book Canada flight for Bioware visit – urgent!

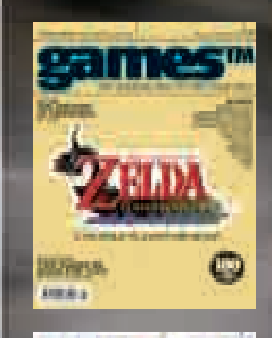
Quote of the Quarter

"War is part of the human experience and games are a reflection of that. On one hand you have reality and then you have games. The two should should never be confused"

Jim Bambra, Managing Director, Pivotal Games



April / May / June







Issue five

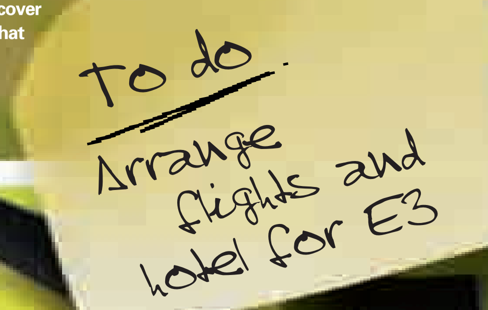
To celebrate Link's colourful rebirth, we decided to devote a large chunk of our Retro section to the history of the *Zelda* series and awarded a 9 to *The Wind Waker*, the game that could and should have changed the Cube's fortunes. It didn't.

Issue si

Trigger fingers itchier than ever, we managed to get our hands on playable code of Irem's last chapter in the *R-Type* legacy. It was finally prised from our grasp by one *Soul Calibur II*, though our poor thumbs will never be the same again. But at least we beat the Bydo scum.

Issue seven

Jetlagged and exhausted after the annual nonsense of E3, we were very excited about the news of *Halo 2*. So we thought we'd best put a picture of Master Chief on the cover of the magazine so that the gamesplaying world could share the moment.



Burnout 2: Point Of Impact

Multiformat May 03

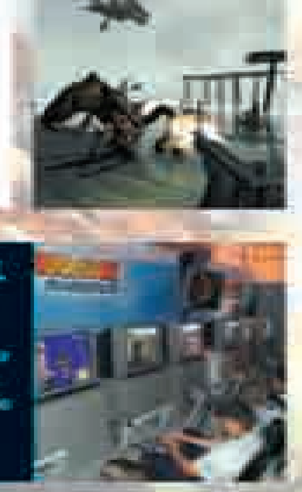
Put the pedal to the metal with Criterion's superb racer and enjoy its supremely playable arcade stylings

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

The spring/summer period is notoriously quiet for the games industry and this year was no exception – if it weren't for a few choice titles sneaking out on import, we'd have been playing the likes of *Moto GP* and *Super Monkey Ball 2* until the leaves started to turn red (not that that would have been a particular hardship). Still, it wasn't all doom and gloom and, thankfully, *Soul Calibur II*, *Viewtiful Joe* and *Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution* came out abroad at just the right time to keep us satisfied. The E3 show in May was a good if underwhelming glimpse of what was to come, but the most apparent thing about this period was the fact that far too many publishers are massively over-reliant on the pre-Christmas boom. C'mon guys, we only want to play some games.

01 April
What a day! Halo 2, Half-Life 2 and Mario Kart all out today

And from that day forth, we swore never to believe another word we read on the Internet – a world wide web of corruption and nudity. Trust us, it's not as good as it sounds... Perhaps the date should have been a giveaway.



05 May
Cube's 2nd birthday
A fairly quiet first year for the Cube, but with titles like *Metroid Prime*, *Super Mario Sunshine* and *Super Monkey Ball 2* it's not the games' fault.

14 May **Rise Of Nations, Issue 7 Final Verdict 9/10**
"Whether you're after the engrossing depth of Civilization in real time, or want an RTS title that offers ancient, Napoleonic and WW2 warfare in one package, *Rise Of Nations* will grant the wishes of rookies and seasoned campaigners alike"



13-15 May E3 Check out Halo 2, Half-Life 2, Prince Of Persia, Mario Kart: Double Dash!
A fairly uneventful show in terms of announcements (except for a certain Sony handheld) but with so many great games on show, at least we got a glimpse of a good year ahead. That queue to see Half-Life 2 though... a terrifying montage of sweat, obesity and free t-shirts that may haunt us until the day we die.

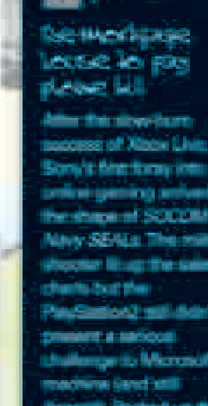


15 May
Don't Enter The Matrix today
If *Enter The Matrix* was as good as the hype made out we'd have been delighted. But it wasn't.



21 May
~~Matrix Reloaded press screening tickets~~
Worst £6 spent this year. Beyond Revelations

11 June
Remortgage house to pay phone bill
After the slow-burn success of Xbox Live, Sony's first foray into online gaming arrived in the shape of *SOCOM: US Navy SEALs*. The military shooter lit up the sales charts but the PlayStation2 still didn't present a serious challenge to Microsoft's machine (and still doesn't). Racked up the phone bills though...



18 June
Appointment with Codemasters

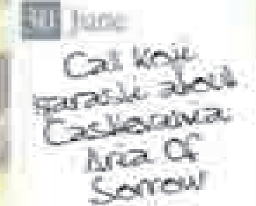
To do.
Remember to pick up MCV 'Best Editorial Team' award

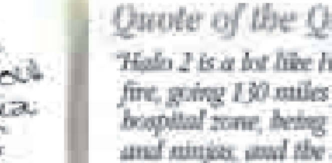
29 June
So lonely, miss playing games...
The infamous summer gaming drought continued and we began to run out of pound coins to throw into the shiny new *F-Zero AX* and well-worn *Dancing Stage* cabinets – we were seriously short of options here and the Christmas games rush wasn't getting any closer. Thank goodness for retro gaming – *Micro Machines*, *Bomberman* and *Mario Kart* were all that could keep us sane.

27 June
F-Zero AX, Issue 7, Final Verdict 9/10
"With its huge cabinet, booming speakers and a bucket seat that that tips violently from side to side, this is one intimidating piece of arcade hardware... and that's before you even sit in the thing"



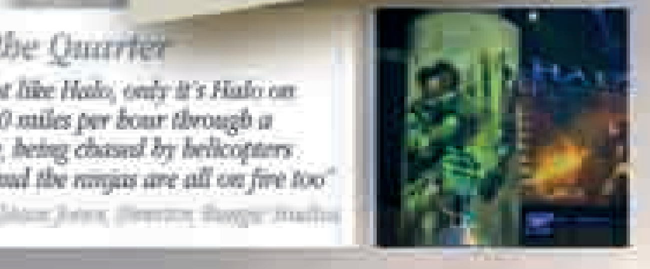




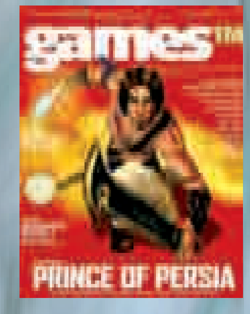


30 June
Call Konami about Castlevania Aria Of Sorrow

Quote of the Quarter
"Halo 2 is a lot like Halo, only it's Halo on fire, going 130 miles per hour through a hospital zone, being chased by helicopters and ninjas, and the ninjas are all on fire too"

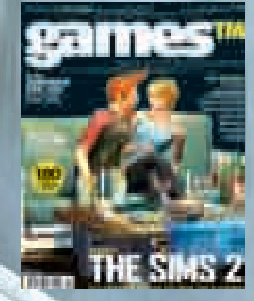


July / August / September



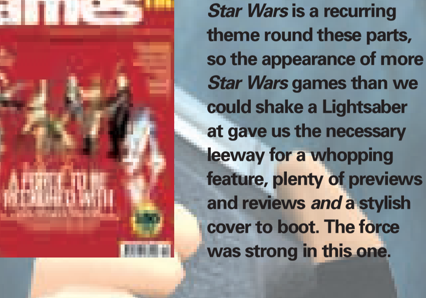
Issue eight

As much as we loved the original game way back in 1989, we were genuinely surprised at how good the next-generation revamp of the *Prince Of Persia* series was turning out to be – so surprised, in fact, that it ended up on the cover of the magazine.



Issue nine

After a trip to EA's San Fransisco headquarters and a chance to play early code of the much-anticipated *Sims 2*, it made sense to go for broke on a *Sims* cover. Living vicariously through a bunch of little pixel people has never been so much fun…



Issue ten

Star Wars is a recurring theme round these parts, so the appearance of more *Star Wars* games than we could shake a Lightsaber at gave us the necessary leeway for a whopping feature, plenty of previews and reviews *and* a stylish cover to boot. The force was strong in this one.

Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness

PlayStation2 July 03

The, er, face that launched a thousand consoles returned, but left many gamers bitterly disappointed. Lara, how could you?

To do:
Trade in Angel Of Darkness
Start saving for N-Gage instead?

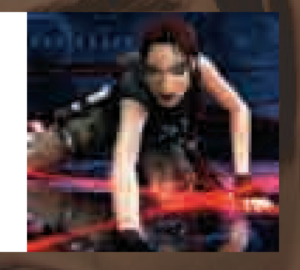
Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday

Even though the third quarter of 2003 threatened to be as barren as the previous three months, those of us with a penchant for importing could at least take solace in a handful of decent games coming our way between July and September. From *Metal Slug 3, R-Type Final* and *Amplitude* to *Viewtiful Joe, Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour* and *F-Zero GX*, we were as happy as Leisure Suit Larry – but not everyone was as lucky. PAL gamers, for instance, had to put up with disappointment after disappointment: having waited an age for *Tomb Raider, Republic* and *Colin McRae 4*, they all ended up failing to live up to our expectations. Indeed, the only good thing was that the summer drought was at least coming to an end. Hello Christmas, here we come…

04 July

National 'Take Lara To Work' day

Released a week behind the PC version on 'Take Lara To Work' day, Ms Croft's first PS2 outing arrived to a rather muted reception – perhaps because we already knew it wasn't much cop. The constant delays to allow for improvements didn't stop this latest *Tomb Raider* title being a big letdown. Sure, there were some nice ideas, but "My arms feel stronger now"? Oh dear…





07 July

Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising Issue 8, Final Verdict 9/10

"The fact that even losing a two-hour brawl can be enjoyable is fitting testament to the game's overall quality and really makes you wonder where so many other games go wrong"



11 July

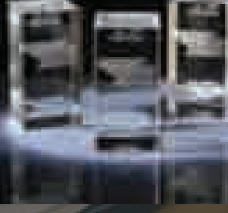
Eye See You

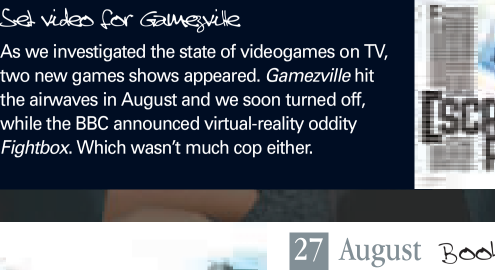
Sony's *EyeToy: Play* launch was a resounding success, even though it's just a handful of mini-games and a USB camera. Still, we can't say we didn't enjoy it…

31 July

Buy paracetamol. Lots of it

The first **games**™ Awards party went off without a hitch, with plenty of winners… and even more hangovers.

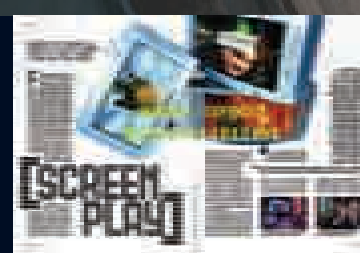




11 August

Sad video for Gamezville

As we investigated the state of videogames on TV, two new games shows appeared. *Gamezville* hit the airwaves in August and we soon turned off, while the BBC announced virtual-reality oddity *Fightbox*. Which wasn't much cop either.



18 August

It's real. Honest

Despite all signs to the contrary, the launch of the Phantom website went some way to proving the damn thing exists. Kind of. We're still not convinced…



20 August

Call Satoru Wata about interview. Don't forget!



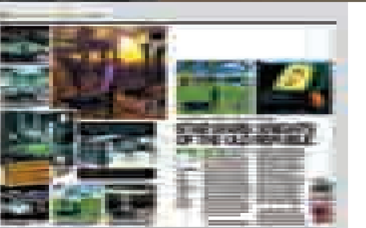
27 August Book train tickets up to ECTS

Smack in the middle of London Games Week, this year's ECTS turned out to be nothing special – it certainly wasn't the wash-out of previous years, but there was nothing revealed that we didn't already know. Even the return of the PlayStation Experience and Nintendo's attempt to hijack it with a games truck-cum-sauna didn't raise our enthusiasm.

03 September

It Had To Happen

With the announcement that *GTA* was coming to the Xbox, Microsoft breathed a sigh of relief and opened a new bank account to store all the profit…

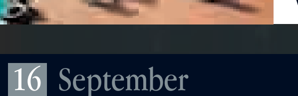


04 September

Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic Issue 10, Final Verdict 9/10

"BioWare has cemented itself as the number-one RPG developer outside Japan… oh, and has made just about the best *Star Wars* game ever in the process"





16 September

Bikini wax for Xbox beach party

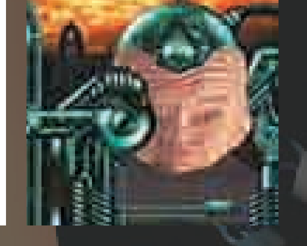
Less about new revelations and much more about patting itself on the back – that pretty much sums up Microsoft's X03 event, held in the south of France. There were no exciting announcements, no earth-shattering new games, no playable *Halo 2* code… what a letdown. Even the arrival of gatecrashers at the event's private beach didn't liven things up. Better luck next year, eh?



Quote of the Quarter

"The current flock of videogames TV shows go wrong on the account that 'yoofs' sound just as tragic and stupid saying 'wicked' and 'wazzock' as the presenters do"

Jack Templeton, Editor, gamesmastertv.co.uk



October / November / December

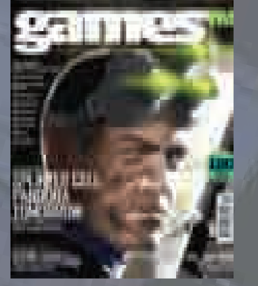


Issue eleven
We packed plenty of sunscreen and headed up to Liverpool for a chinwag with the *Project Gotham Racing 2* team at Bizarre Creations. We had a couple of preliminary laps around the new city circuits and were blown away – racing never looked so good.



Issue twelve
A trip to Frankfurt allowed us to catch up with the guys at Epic Games for the lowdown on the next addition to the *Unreal Tournament* series. The all-new vehicles, maps and game modes got a thorough test drive – this title looks bigger and better than ever.





Issue thirteen
Destintion Paris, with the primary mission objective of stealthily infiltrating the minds of Ubisoft's *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* team. Secondary objective? To discover just what lies in store for Sam Fisher in his hotly anticipated second adventure.

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Si 3

Xbox November 03

Put on your headset, emerge from the shadows and get ready to 'zulu go'. Some of the finest stealth shooting action this year…

Christmas List

Hidden & Dangerous 2
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga
Pokémon Colosseum
Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time
Counter-Strike
Rainbow Six 3
Grabbed By The Ghoulies

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

'Tis the season to be jolly if you're a publisher with a major title on the shelves in time for the yuletide spending frenzy. Yet while many of the year's biggest releases were indeed unveiled in the lucrative run-up to Christmas there were also plenty of notable absentees. Even though release schedules penned earlier in the year predicted that the likes of *Half-Life 2*, *Deus Ex: Invisible War* and *Gran Turismo 4* would make it into our stockings on 25 December, over the course of 2003 we've become masters in the art of not holding our breath. But thanks to such gems as *Project Gotham Racing 2*, *Prince Of Persia* and *Call Of Duty*, the year's final quarter has been anything but a disappointment, and those frustrating delays have only made the prospect of 2004 all the more exciting.

01 October

So long, farewell…

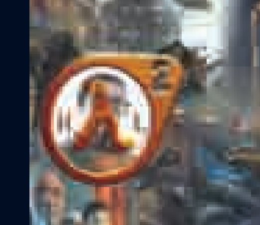
Eidos parted company with *Champ Manager* developer Sports Interactive, retaining the brand name but losing the game code and player database. The end of an era?

02 October

Practise French for visit to Ubisoft

03 October Download Half-Life 2 code

After failing to keep its promises that *Half-Life 2* would definitely appear in stores worldwide on 30 September, Valve received a blow of its own when source code for the game was stolen. The code was then distributed across the net in an elaborate hacking scheme that gave gamers a glimpse of what to expect when the long-awaited title eventually does go on sale. Tip-offs about the perpetrators are welcome at helpvalve@valvesoftware.com



07 October

Get to the shops

The N-Gage launched amidst optimistic predictions from Nokia that sales were expected to reach nine million in 2004. We think that's a little hopeful.



10 October

Pre-Christmas sales start

Just in time for the Christmas rush, Sony and Nintendo moved to supplement the lure of their yuletide line-up of triple-A titles by slashing the price of their respective home consoles. Sony led the way by reducing the PS2's RRP to £129.99 and introducing a limited edition silver model, before the GameCube dropped to just £79.99 and was bundled aggressively.



20 October

Pro Evolution Soccer 3, Issue 12
Final Verdict 9/10

"With every incarnation the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series edges further clear of its rivals by providing the most convincing and compelling simulation of the beautiful game the world has ever seen"

25 October

Remember to ask Team 17 about getting Alien Breed on GBA…



04 November

All the same?

IBM revealed that it will be providing chips for not only Nintendo's N5 and the PlayStation3 but also the next Microsoft console. Is there a single-format future?

05 November

New York!

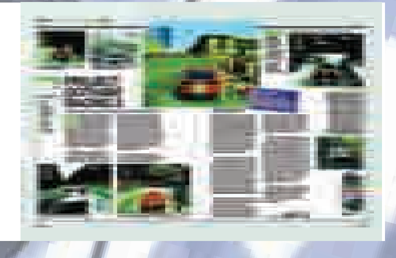
The gaming world finally got to feast its eyes on Sony's forthcoming entrant into the handheld market after images of the prototype PSP were allegedly leaked after a secret unveiling in New York. With the first glimpse of its streamlined design, whopping 4.5-inch screen and recognisable button layout pundits were already foretelling the end of the GBA's reign. Should Nintendo be worried…?



28 November

Project Gotham Racing 2, Issue 13
Final Verdict 9/10

"You always feel in control and the perfectly judged difficulty levels ensure there's something for everyone, no matter how good they are behind the wheel"



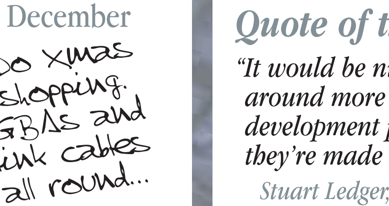
13 December

Holiday in Japan?

Sony's PSX console/home entertainment system launched in Japan, retailing at around £533 for the 250Gb HDD model and £434 for its 160Gb cousin.

24 December

Do Xmas shopping. GBAs and link cables all round…



Quote of the Quarter

"It would be nice to see blame shared around more in the industry. Not all development personnel are the geniuses they're made out to be"

Stuart Ledger, PR Director, MK Communications



Year Planner 2004



Halo 2
Bungie's very sensible 'you'll have it when it's ready' attitude might have annoyed a lot of gamers, but it can only prove to be a good thing for the development of *Halo 2*. There's a lot riding on the game's release, so here's hoping it doesn't end up being a disappointment.





Half-Life 2
Leaked code, slipped release dates and a great big wall of silence – things haven't exactly been great for Valve, but we're sure that won't stop it putting together a truly great sequel to the PC game that almost everyone loves. At least nothing else can go wrong… can it?



Gran Turismo 4
Cruelly postponed until after Christmas by an obviously cunning Sony, the game that promises to eclipse every other driving game in existence (well, in theory anyway) should prove to make the spring pass by fairly quickly. We've played the demo and it's very nice indeed.

Halo 2
Xbox First Quarter 04
The Covenant are still here, but luckily so is Master Chief. *Halo* returns in 2004 – bigger, better and online…

COVER IDEAS?
1) Man with gun
2) Man with car
3) Car with gun?
4) Man with gun AND car

Year Planner 2004

And so we come to the year ahead – 12 months that, in terms of new titles, don't look as though they're going to be nearly as exciting as the ones we've just enjoyed. That said, few of us could have predicted some of the quality games that we've seen in 2003 (not that they've all done as well as they deserved, of course – *Prince Of Persia*, what went wrong?) and in that respect, we're more than prepared to have a few surprises sprung on us as the coming months unfold. All things considered, we're more interested in the possibilities of new hardware rather than software; specifically Nintendo's new project (that looks set to be unveiled in May), Sony's handheld wonder the PSP (which, in the light of the PSX being cut down, might not turn out to be as great as we're hoping), and the chance that Microsoft might think about showing off the Xbox 2. You never know, this could be the best year yet…

01 January

Save xmas cash for the sales

Even though it's pretty unlikely that we'll have much money left after December's spending spree, you need to remember that a lot of decent titles have slipped into the early part of 2004. As such, prepare to have enough resources on hand for the likes of *Gran Turismo 4, Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles, Ninja Gaiden, Mario Golf, Driver 3* and much more besides.



14 February



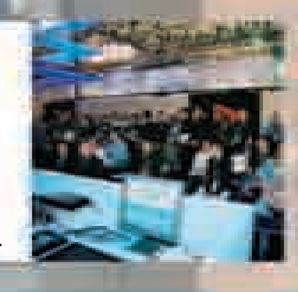
Buy cards for all those lovely PR ladies



22 March

Show and tell

Kicking the year off (sort of) with a bang, there's the ATEI Arcade show in London followed by the Game Developer Conference. And we've got our tickets already.



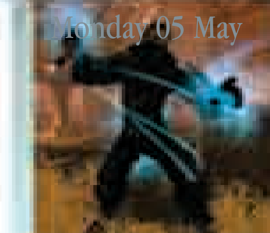
29 March

Submit designs for new GBA to Nintendo

01 April

Xbox explosion?

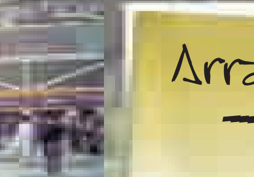
According to those in the know, there's a whole stack of Xbox goodness due to launch on April Fool's Day. But then look what happened in 2003…



12 May

Book flights to Los Angeles

Damn it, another week-long trip to America just to talk to people who work in London… Not that we're complaining, of course – this year's E3 looks to be rather spectacular, what with the promised showing of Nintendo's new secret hardware, Sony's new secret hardware and Microsoft's, er, new secret hardware. Yes, it really will be that imaginative.



Arrange time off for:
X04
ECTS
London Interactive
Edinburgh Games Festival

Bank and Public Holidays

Bank holidays – officially sanctioned days off work or college to sit around and play games. We have simple tastes, so these keep us very happy indeed…

May

M	-	3	10	17	24	31
T	-	4	11	18	25	-
W	-	5	12	19	26	-
T	-	6	13	20	27	-
F	-	7	14	21	28	-
S	1	8	15	22	29	-
S	2	9	16	23	30	-

June

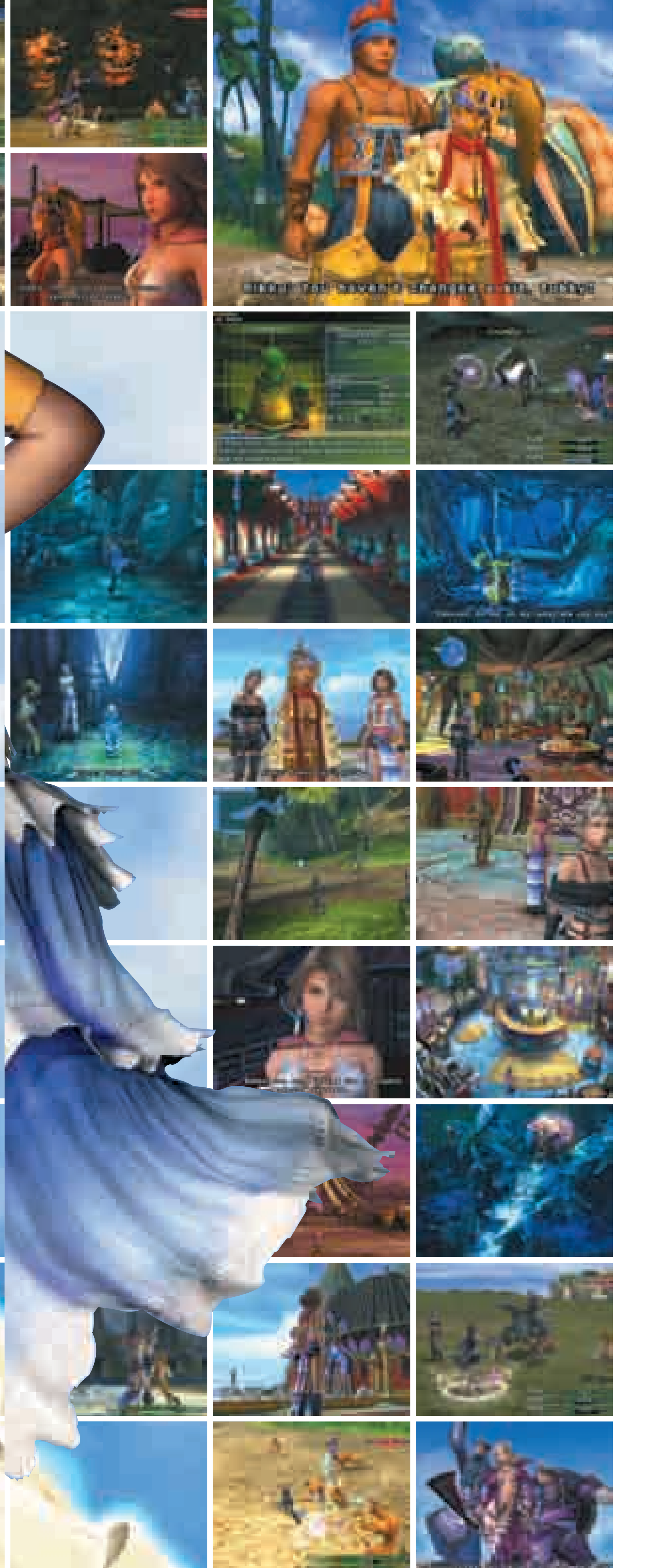
M	-	7	14	21	28	
T	1	8	15	22	29	
W	2	9	16	23	30	
T	3	10	17	24	-	
F	4	11	18	25	-	
S	5	12	19	26	-	
S	6	13	20	27	-	

July

M	-	5	12	19	26	
T	-	6	13	20	27	
W	-	7	14	21	28	
T	1	8	15	22	29	
F	2	9	16	23	30	
S	3	10	17	24	31	
S	4	11	18	25	-	

Book holiday for July – there'll be no good games out anyway





REVIEWS

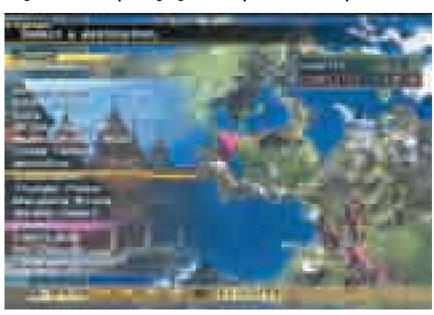
THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, **games™** is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five, you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad, we'll make sure you know; if it's great, we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.





The world map is your ticket to missions, freebies and encounters galore with Hotspots highlighted as important events or quests.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
Square Enix

PRICE
£39.99 (Import)

RELEASE
Q1 '04
(US/Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

SHADOW HEARTS

BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS...

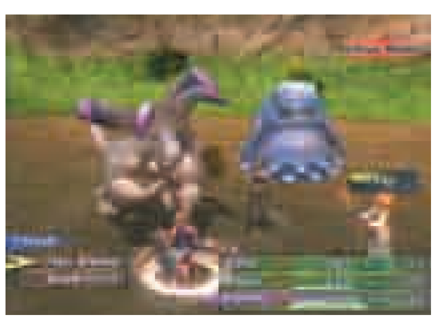
GRANDIA II

I'M NOT A GIRL, NOT YET A WOMAN

FINAL FANTASY X-2

In the age of the sequel, even the strongest series can't hold out forever. With many firms churning out the same old thing year after year, the public's need for the familiar is constantly on the up. To this end, even the likes of Square Enix have caved in under the pressure of the sequel-friendly market, hence the release of *X-2*. It seems odd that the latest *Final Fantasy* title is the first to get a follow-up – the obvious choice would be *VII*, after all – but at least the world of Spira and its many inhabitants is still fairly fresh in our minds. It seems a little lazy that many of the characters and locations are reused without obvious augmentations – couldn't we have seen a more varied selection of Spira's Hotspots? Still, with the freedom of an airship from the start of the game, you'll be exploring the furthest reaches of the newly Calm continent in no time.

Battling is integral to any role-playing game so it's some relief that *X-2* can boast that this is one of its stronger areas. Aside from the all-too-frequent nature of the random encounters, we were pleasantly surprised to find a little more depth to the Dress Sphere system than we expected. Where each member of *Final Fantasy X*'s party had a unique strength (such as Wakka's accuracy on flying foes or Auron's armour-piercing attacks), *X-2* employs a similar idea with the various outfits. This is now less forced than it was before – a good offence can win through many battles regardless – but it's still advisable to use the Songstress and Black Mage classes (among the many others) to best more powerful enemies. Thanks to the return of an upgraded Active Time Battle system, combos can be initiated with decent timing but this can sometimes degenerate into confusion. This isn't the last of our woes either…



RPG rules apply – no matter how big it is, there's always a weak point.



Equipment is kept simple, allowing just two accessories at a time.

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG?
Speeding through the game can be done in 15-20 hours, double that for a decent playthrough and triple it for an all-in tour. Then there's New Game+ mode…

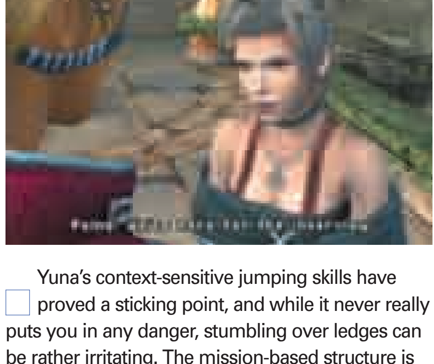
Q. FAN SERVICE?
In no uncertain terms, yes. Although it does explain a little back story, *FFX* players will be the only ones who really get it.

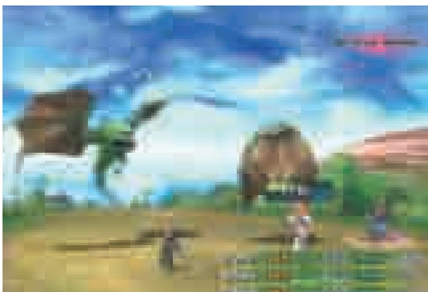
Q. HOW MANY OUTFITS?
Fourteen basic costumes, but these can vary between characters and, as you'd expect, there's a few more tucked away…



Newcomer Paine is the strong but silent type, presumably in an attempt to emulate *Final Fantasy X*'s mysterious Auron…

Without Wakka's help these guys are tough, right? Wrong. Square's Angels take down foes with comparative ease this time around.







Yuna's context-sensitive jumping skills have proved a sticking point, and while it never really puts you in any danger, stumbling over ledges can be rather irritating. The mission-based structure is also something that will frustrate the more traditional RPG player, but worries of the narrative collapsing because of this are unfounded, even if the plot is driven predominantly in *Final Fantasy X*'s cut-scene-heavy manner. For its simplicity, the story works surprisingly well in context, and while it does see you tearing around the same locations as the previous game and fighting rather similar nasties, the Calm has taken its toll and many of them are slightly different this time around. If you can look past this over-familiarity, there's a great selection of missions and quests just waiting to be undertaken.

Criticisms levelled at the incredibly linear nature of *Final Fantasy X* have been acted upon, resulting in the relative freedom of *X-2*'s mission system and the branching storyline with multiple endings. The freedom to explore any part of the world from the off is very welcome, and though only a few at a time will hold missions, there are items and sub-quests galore for the more eager adventurer. Of course, there are certain missions that need to be finished in order to progress the story, and while many of these involve locating Spheres (this is Yuna's job now, after all), they are tackled in a suitably varied manner to keep interest up.

As with *Final Fantasy X*, visuals are nothing short of beautiful and only the rough edges on models mar the overall look. Graphics are coupled with another display of great voice acting but the soundtrack is not all of such a high standard – while some areas enjoy a score that rivals any similar title, a lot of the game's music is notably inferior to much that has gone before. This is more due to the change in style than anything else but we must mourn the loss of the familiar victory tune, a *Final Fantasy* tradition that we only hope returns in *XII*.

Ultimately, *X-2* is a worthy successor to *Final Fantasy X*, and while the unique execution won't appeal to everyone, it's a welcome change from the usual fare and could win over a few people to what is usually seen as a much more traditional series. It may not be the longest of adventures, but if nothing else it will make the wait for *XII* slightly easier to bear.



VERDICT 7/10

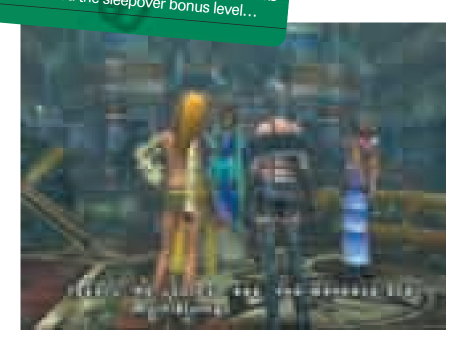
SOLID BUT OVERLY FAMILIAR RPG ACTION

games™ FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

RPG: As this is a Square Enix game, you know it's either a) an RPG or b) awful. *X-2* is the former.

BARBIE: Dressing up your girls seems odd but works well. Sadly, we missed the sleepover bonus level…



IT'S A GIRL THING

One of the main hurdles for the more serious role player to clear will be the unbelievably light-hearted approach to a simple story. This is exemplified by the 'girl power' themes (we're hardly the first people to pick up on the obvious parallels with *Charlie's Angels*), and while the core game is strong enough to hold its own in the *Final Fantasy* universe, the dress-up combat and whimsical approach could easily deter less patient or open-minded players. Even for the more easygoing gamer, there are times when the 'you go, girl' attitude can grate a little but, thankfully, there are enough well-scripted moments to balance this out and keep the whole game flowing and enjoyable.



Jump straight in at the Zanarkand Ruins and you'll most likely manage a ten-second stroll before something ten times your size attacks you.



Yuna's performances are often great little tunes, but whether they befit a *Final Fantasy* heroine is still up for debate.





DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Alphadream Corporation

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

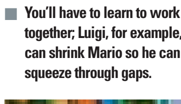
THE BROTHERS MARIO STILL HAVE THAT ALL-STAR POTENTIAL

MARIO & LUIGI: SUPERSTAR SAGA

With the Game Boy Advance swiftly marching towards its third birthday (it's in June, if you fancy sending a card), it comes as a rather sobering thought to realise that *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga* marks the first completely original 'proper' Mario game on the handheld. Maybe we weren't quite as bothered about the steady stream of SNES remakes as some were, what with us being the retro fans we are, but all the same, there's only so much old-school platform action you can take before you crave something new. You have to wonder why it's taken Nintendo over two years to get around to it…

Thankfully, you'll be relieved to hear that for such a long-awaited title, *Mario & Luigi* more than delivers the goods. Rather than praising Nintendo though, much of the kudos for creating such an impressive game goes to little-known developer Alphadream, previously responsible for the baffling Japan-only RPG *Tomato Adventure* on the GBA. We mention this not in an effort to prove we've done our research, but because it doesn't take much more than a quick glance at the two games to see where *Mario & Luigi* gets at least some of its graphical influences from – though thanks to the game's suitably colourful and well-animated cartoon-style look, this isn't a criticism.

The game also manages to escape the shackles of Nintendo's past by improvising upon the classic tale of Mario saving the day and putting a lot of the old-school characters on the bench. Instead of Bowser, we now have the evil Cacklette, a wicked witch from the neighbouring Beanbean Kingdom who seems intent on stealing Princess Peach's voice and using it for her own diabolical needs – boo, hiss and so on. While that's not to say that you won't recognise a lot of the faces appearing along the way, the addition of yet another new kingdom for you to explore certainly



You'll have to learn to work together; Luigi, for example, can shrink Mario so he can squeeze through gaps.

Bowser starts off on your side, but things go awry when his cruiser crashes. Though he may still crop up later…







It's not all RPG-style action – some sections are real treats for platform fans, though they require quite a bit of thought.

helps after the deluge of NES and SNES conversions. What manages to save this somewhat protracted plot from going the same way as *Super Mario Bros 2*, though (Wart who?), is the game's subtle sense of humour, with sly digs and smile-raising antics throughout. From Bowser's initial attempt at kidnapping the Princess and hardly anyone knowing who Luigi is because of Mario's constant spotlight hogging, to the requisite henchman with his horribly broken English and constant references to Cacklette's 'plan sandwich', there's a real personality about the whole thing that has Nintendo's magic influence written all over it, even if it does poke fun at itself in the process.

While the story is brand new, much of the gameplay is a proven formula and early speculation that *Mario & Luigi* draws much of its inspiration from *Super Mario RPG* and *Paper Mario* was right on the money. Cribbing not only most of the original ideas from Square's SNES adventure (turn-based battling, using timed button presses to enhance your attacks and so on), but also most of the improvements that *Paper Mario* made over it too, *Mario & Luigi* ends up being the same interesting hybrid of platform action and role-playing ideals that we loved before. The major change, however, is that you now control Mario and Luigi simultaneously – something that makes a big difference to how you have to approach each situation.

Not surprisingly, it's this concept that really puts the game over and above anything else of the same ilk around today. Despite sounding horribly complicated, the simple method of controlling two sprites at once makes it easy to grasp – the front character leads and is controlled with the A and R buttons, while the rear follows and uses the B and L buttons. However, there's enough scope for improvement (by learning new moves and special hidden tricks) to warrant mastering the controls. The use of two characters with different skills also helps shape the form taken by many of the game's puzzles and challenges, as you'll often have to think two steps ahead to work out what to do – even something as simple as jumping over a spike trap requires more skill than usual, thanks to the need for two button presses rather than one. What's more, the game mixes things up a bit by separating the pair at intervals, meaning you'll have to adjust your approach to each puzzle when there's only one Mario Brother to hand.

Throw in a surprising amount of depth for something that looks so simple and you've got a Mario title that manages to be everything we'd hoped for and more besides. Certainly, it may not lean enough in either direction for hardcore platform or RPG fanatics to find everything they're looking for, but as far as genre-crossing titles go, they don't come much more enjoyable or extensive than this.

games™

FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

MIND THE GAP: The action in *Mario & Luigi* is platform-based, like all the other classic Mario titles.

RPGOODNESS: Levelling up and gathering items to replenish stats give a distinct RPG flavour.

TAG-TEAM TITANS

One of the benefits of being able to control both Mario and Luigi comes in battle. As you gain new techniques like jumping and hammering, you'll learn special Bros Moves that can be used in combat to dish out extra damage. Mastering these moves requires precise timing of your button presses, which is why they come in three different forms – the first slows the action and tells you when to press the buttons; the second removes the slow motion; and the third is for those who've got them down to a fine art. The harder the move, the less Bros Points it costs and the more damage it delivers, so learning them all is rather important.

Cacklette is a nasty piece of work, but this fight is just a taste of what she can dish out. It gets worse…

FAQs

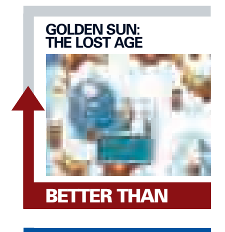
Q. TWO AT ONCE?
It's not as confusing as it sounds – you control one character and the other follows. Switching them around and using each one's specific moves is all done with single button presses.

Q. MUCH TO DO?
Absolutely loads, considering it's 'just a GBA game'. False endings and new quests pop up on a regular basis, and that's not even considering all the side-quests and mini-games.

Q. RANDOM BATTLES?
Thankfully not. Enemies can be avoided in most areas, though you'll have to fight to build up your levels and stand a chance against the tougher monsters.

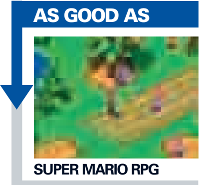
VERDICT 9/10
ANOTHER SLICE OF HANDHELD NINTENDO MAGIC

GOLDEN SUN: THE LOST AGE



BETTER THAN

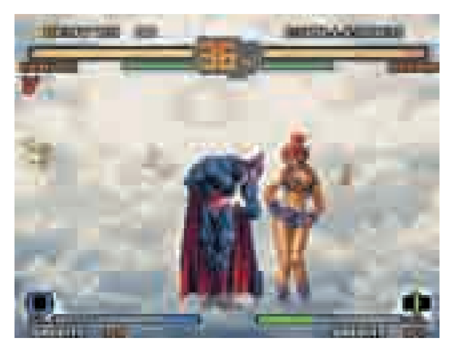
AS GOOD AS



SUPER MARIO RPG



Demitri turns opponents into ladies, before sucking the life out of them.









SNK'S JUDO CHOP IS NO MATCH FOR CAPCOM'S ONE-INCH PUNCH

SNK VS.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Arcade

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, Neo-Geo

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SNK

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£1 per play

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2



hile Capcom may claim to have hung up its gloves as far as producing arcade titles goes, there's no doubt it still dominates the 2D beat-'em-up world. Thanks to the success of its *Street Fighter* titles, the series that redefined the genre is usually the first thing that springs to mind when you bring up the subject of beat-'em-ups – a fact that no doubt irks the SNK hardcore contingent. But the tide is turning; with SNK experiencing something of a comeback, the belief that Capcom has had its own way for too long is growing stronger. The question is, can SNK capitalise on the opportunity while the competition isn't looking?

Given the anticipation that's been building since the announcement of *SNK vs. Capcom Chaos*, you'd expect the answer to be a resounding yes – after all, this is the game that so many people claim to have been waiting for since the crossover titles began. The thought of a *vs.* title from the SNK perspective (complete with the distinctive visual style and gameplay that has distinguished all SNK's fighting titles in the past) is one that intrigues us, particularly after the recent glut of similar Capcom attempts. However, this kind of knife-edge suspense can breed disappointment…

Earthquake from the *Samurai Shodown* series makes a welcome return and can still dish it out…

That's not to say that *SVC Chaos* is a bad game – far from it. With so much experience of creating 2D fighting games (from the heady days of

NOT SO FRIENDLY FACES

In an effort to surpass Capcom's efforts, SNK has given fans some interesting choices in the way of secret fighters. There are 12 to choose from, although only eight of them are playable. Some, like Dan, Geese Howard, Goenitz and '*Riot Of Blood*' Iori are somewhat predictable, but the appearance of Demitri from *DarkStalkers*, Zero from *MegaMan Zero* and even the Mars People from *Metal Slug* are sure to bring a smile to any fanboy's face. The other four only appear as über-bosses, which makes the appearance of a new angelic version of Athena or even a pumped-up Red Arremer (aka Firebrand) from *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* even more special.



Diminutive he may be, but Zero's range of moves makes him a more than worthy opponent for even the most seasoned beat-'em-up veteran.





FAQs

Q. SAME STYLE?
Absolutely not. Even though it bears the Capcom name, this is an SNK game through and through. As such, fans of the *Street Fighter* series might find it a somewhat sour-tasting experience.

Q. SILKY SMOOTH?
The animation's mostly top-notch, but a number of lapses in concentration let the side down, making it the poor cousin of SNK's *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*.

Q. SUPER SECRET CHARACTERS?
There are four more (two for each side) in the form of Shin-Karate, Shin-Akuma, Red Arremer and Athena, but they're not playable. They only make a challenge if you do really, really well.



CAPCOM CHAOS

Art Of Fighting and *Samurai Shodown* to the epic *King Of The Fighters* series and even more spin-offs besides), you'd be a fool to think that at least some of that wouldn't rub off onto *SVC Chaos*' gameplay. However, that's a hurdle that may cause a lot of people to stumble straight away, simply because this is an SNK game; anyone expecting the loose-handling, combo-crazy razzle-dazzle of the Capcom titles could be deterred by how far the pendulum has swung towards the SNK camp.

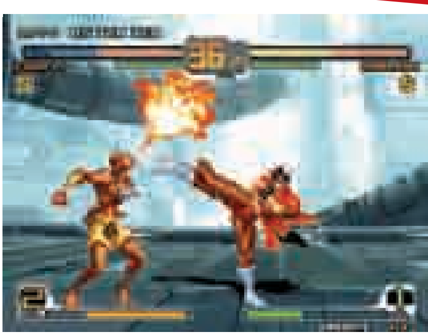
Just as the *Capcom vs. SNK* games were Capcom titles with a mixed roster and bits of SNK gameplay thrown in, so *SVC Chaos* is exactly the opposite. Gone are the six-button layouts, cartoon-style graphics and Capcom-based gameplay features, and in their place is a decidedly tight and gritty game that leaves little room for error. Whether that also means 'outdated' is up to you; while the four-button combat and MVS graphics smack of ageing technology, there's no denying that the game is still quite attractive. The animation might not be up to the standard of recent SNK titles (like *Metal Slug 4* and *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*) and the use of some old SNK character sprites is disappointing, but the redesigning of key Capcom characters like Ken, Guile and M Bison to fit in with the SNK ethic is something we approve of.

Sadly, it's trade-offs like this that are the thorn in *SVC Chaos*' side, with every plus point having a corresponding negative. Aesthetically, for instance, the game is fairly bland – some lacklustre backgrounds and uninspired music indicate that perhaps SNK has lost some of its touch. In contrast, the almost comical pre-beating interaction between the fighters is surprisingly refreshing, as it's rare to see story set-ups in beat-'em-ups these days. The line-up of fighters is decent enough and has many familiar faces, but some horribly unbalanced move sets make strategic play almost non-existent when you're facing cheap players who employ keep-away tactics. Speaking of moves, the combination of SNK and Capcom styles is relatively solid – the use of a three-level super bar, 'desperation' Exceed moves and the removal of fit-inducing flashing effects all work well, but, sadly, the loss of elements such as air-blocking and super jumping could put off all but the most stalwart SNK fans.

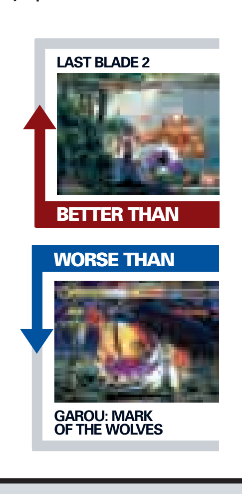
And that's probably the biggest problem with SNK's first foray into the *vs.* style; it fails to go far enough in either direction to please either set of players, leaving itself lost in the middle. With none of the finesse of a Capcom title, but feeling too diluted against some of SNK's previous outings, *SVC Chaos* manages to just keep its head above the average waters.



DECENT ENOUGH, BUT LACKING IN VITAL AREAS



All the Capcom team have been redesigned with traditional SNK ideals in mind, and most of them look pretty impressive.





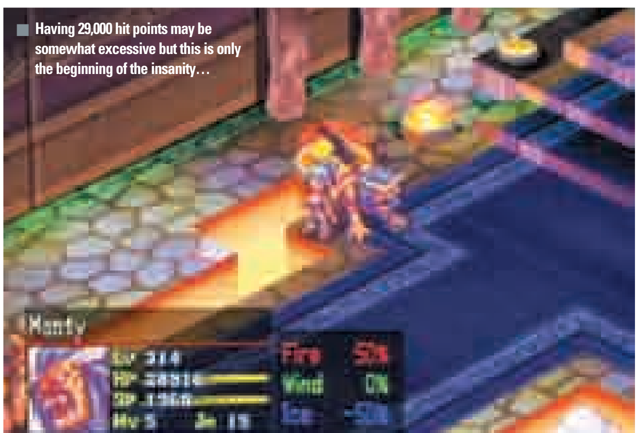
As you progress, this table fills with more and more potential warriors and monsters for your war effort.



All commands are entered at the beginning of a turn and don't take place until you select Execute.



Having 29,000 hit points may be somewhat excessive but this is only the beginning of the insanity…





DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Atlus

DEVELOPER
Nippon Ichi

PRICE
£39.99 (Import)

RELEASE
TBA (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

DISGAEA:



As funny as their frequent cries of 'dood' may be, Prinnies are weak as hell. Still, we can't stop recruiting the little fellows…

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG?
Months of your life will vanish before you reach the end, though we can all but promise you'll never max out your party.

Q. JOBS?
Over 150 character classes and monsters are ready and willing to join your side, but finding them all is a massive commitment.

Q. TOO MUCH?
Perhaps, yes, but at least you'll never have to worry about running out of things to do. Or you could just skip some gameplay elements.

The petition to get games branded with labels like those on cigarette packets starts here. We've all been there – even though you've got a few games on the go, you give into temptation and before you know it the title you picked up on a whim is ruling your every waking hour. So under this new initiative, games like *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* would carry warnings that they may seriously shorten your life, while '*Super Monkey Ball* is addictive – don't start' would be a common sight on shop shelves. Furthering the idea, the worst offending titles would be kept behind the counter, but even then the life-ruining potential of something like *Disgaea* just cannot be quantified. Simply put, if Atlus' latest takes hold, you may never actually get away…

Disgaea's most obvious (and arguably only) flaw will be the biggest stumbling block for many – it simply doesn't look like it belongs in this generation. Resembling a throwback from the late PSone days, only the snappy effects and hi-res cut-scene images remind you that you're not coming over all retro. The style itself is much more impressive, and while graphical malnourishment may be apparent you only have to look elsewhere in the game to discover where the majority of the effort has been rightfully diverted. A good score and fantastic voice talent bolster the presentation somewhat, but much of the crammed DVD is taken up by something far too many games lack these days – a little thing called gameplay.

It may not do things by the book but *Disgaea* sets its own rules early on and sticks to them. They're remarkably solid considering the highly quirky and tongue-in-cheek attitude that's noticeable in every area of the game – it should come as no surprise to be throwing enemies around, attacking them with exploding penguins called Prinnies (who have a bizarre fondness for the word 'dood'), or teaming up to fling them around after they take damage when the colour red is destroyed. It's every bit as good and bizarre as it sounds, and the material bonuses and feeling of immense satisfaction that accompany a well-planned combo make all the planning well worth your while.

As gamers who have been brought up on poor translations and hackneyed storylines, it's an absolute pleasure to see Atlus once again break the mould and excel in both areas. The light-hearted and often nonsensical approach forms an oasis in the vast expanse of trudging narratives; we're not sure an RPG has ever made us laugh this much, at least not intentionally. This gives you yet another reason to keep playing (as if you needed one), and considering the none-too-serious execution, character building and progression also get you hooked in a remarkably convincing and enjoyable fashion.

With the potential for character levels well into four figures and damage amounts actually measured in thousands in the later stages, *Disgaea* is possibly the epitome of the word 'hardcore'. Seeing as new level-one fighters hit for single digits, you get some idea of the commitment required to reach said experience and damage levels. Atlus has done a wonderful job of keeping the game as user-friendly as possible though, and it is possible to finish the game without even scratching its surface. Naturally, you'll be missing out on a huge chunk of the experience, but if you wanted to skip Item World levelling up, Dark Assembly meetings (where you can propose and debate new game features and options with the elders) and Geo Panel colour combos, there's nothing to stop you doing so.

With more numbers than a really good episode of *Countdown* and a hell of a lot more fun than anyone would have dared associate with the genre, *Disgaea* is without a doubt the defining moment in turn-based strategy. Not since *Dark Cloud 2* has a game offered so much in terms of optional further play, and we'd seriously question whether any other title will dare brave this lofty plateau of life-emaciating gaming. While *Advance Wars 2* blew us away with its simplicity, *Disgaea* finds itself at a polar opposite by offering the player more to do than will ever be possible in a lifetime. Seriously. This may frustrate some investors, believing that you'll never truly get your money's worth, but this simply isn't the case. In fact, the money that changes hands for a plastic case, a booklet and a disc is entirely justified within the first few hours of play, leaving the subsequent vanishing months to be freely enjoyed.

HOUR OF DARKNESS

SERIOUSLY NOW, HOW MUCH BETTER CAN STRATEGY RPGS GET?

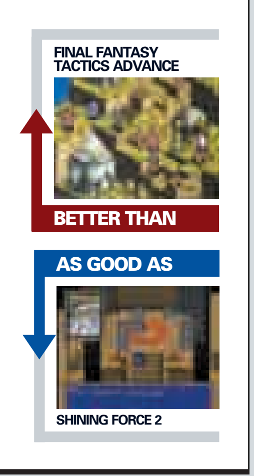


WELCOME TO MY WORLD

Levelling up items by using them is all well and good, but like virtually every other aspect of this game, Atlus refuses to go with the tried and tested. Cue Item World, a hundred-level random dungeon that exists within every weapon, item and garment in the game and that houses specialists who, when beaten, will power up your tools accordingly. These guys can even be transferred between items to create the perfect weapon, but be warned – the better the item, the harder its Item World dungeon will be. For some kind of idea of how much work is involved in getting the ultimate inventory, you'll need to find the right weapons and equipment for your ten-strong team before trekking through 4,000 levels worth of random dungeons to max it all out. Did we mention that there's a main quest as well?







CASTLEVANIA

A 3D VAMPIRE ADVENTURE WITH BITE (BUT NOT ENOUGH TO BREAK THE SKIN)





DETAILS

FORMAT
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

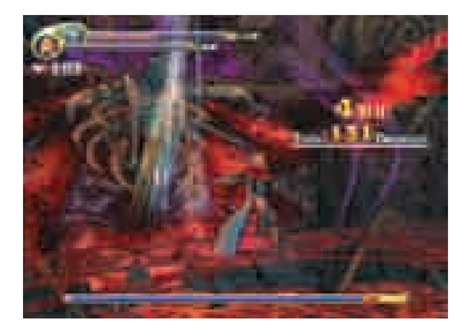
PUBLISHER
Konami

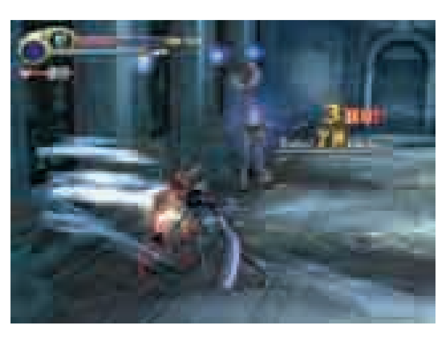
DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
14 February
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

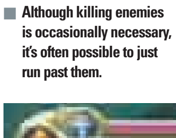




Heresy isn't a word you'll often hear used in relation to videogames, but it was probably the first thing shouted by hardcore *Castlevania* fans when they found out this update was going to be in 3D. "What? 3D? Like those disappointing N64 games? How dare they!" and so on. But this hasn't stopped Konami creating a game that not only tries to succeed in three dimensions where previous attempts have failed, but also serves as a prequel to every other game in the series and fills in some of the blanks. So we have a new hero in the form of Leon Belmont (the first Belmont to take up the whip), a new vampire lord called Walter (yes, Walter) and a shiny new castle for you to explore… in 3D. Yet as much as we were expecting the worst, the results aren't actually too bad.

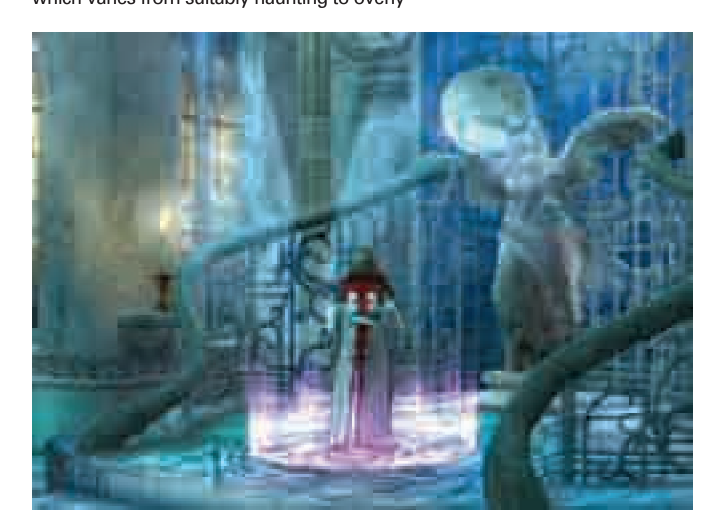
You see, Konami (or rather Koji Igarashi, the man behind top *Castlevania* games like *Aria Of Sorrow* and *Symphony Of The Night*) has worked hard to make this 3D title feel more like a 2D game. As such, many of the gameplay features that we've seen in the last few *Castlevania* games are here, such as the power-up system, albeit in cut-down form. There are also new concepts like the real-time item menus that allow you to access your inventory without stopping the action, and a roving camera that adjusts to give you the best view of your position. What's more, some aspects that appear new and that may annoy the fans are actually reminiscent of the 2D games; for instance, having rooms where you have to kill every enemy before being allowed to move on is perfectly justified as that was often the case in 2D, simply because they blocked your path from A to B.

And then there's the vital *Castlevania* atmosphere – something that this new game has successfully captured. There's nice attention to detail in places, with each area of the castle having its own unique feel (such as the dank Anti-Soul Mysteries Lab or the overgrown Garden Forgotten By Time), and while we have a few gripes – a bit of variety would have been nice among all the similar-looking corridors – it at least looks authentic enough. The same can also be said of the music, which varies from suitably haunting to overly



Although killing enemies is occasionally necessary, it's often possible to just run past them.







Leon will often be outnumbered, so you'll have use the 'guard' and 'dodge' moves.

You'll have to defeat the five bosses before you can access Walter's inner sanctum, but they're not that tough.

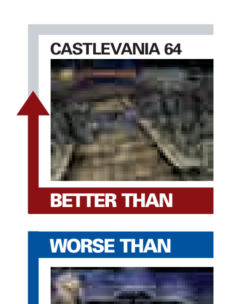


dramatic depending on the situation; it's not all great, but then we've certainly heard worse.

Sadly, while *Castlevania* manages to almost dig itself out of one hole by improving the 3D and looking very nice, it then manages to stumble into several others in quick succession. The biggest complaint is the size of the game – despite the 3D stylings making everything seem bigger, the game is just too damn small to last that long for any but the most inexperienced *Castlevania* player. Titles like *Metroid Prime* have proved that it's perfectly possible to move a sprawling 2D exploration-based game into 3D without losing any of the scale, yet *Castlevania*'s hub-style map (five main areas, all accessed from a central castle hall) is too stilted to offer any real sense of exploration, thanks to the lack of alternative paths.

The same also goes for the way that Leon's stats and abilities improve throughout the game. With the levelling-up process removed, character improvement relegated to the collection of power-ups, and items only found in special rooms rather than being dropped by enemies, there's no incentive to kill anything besides the boss of each area unless you absolutely have to. Nor will you want to spend your time revisiting previously explored areas to enhance your power. The scope for enhancing your stats through armour, weapons and accessories isn't as great as it was before either, removing a lot of the strategy and making the whole experience rather shallow.

Certainly, *Castlevania* isn't anywhere near as disappointing as many people were expecting. But many of the decisions that have been made to create the final product (both in terms of what's been added and what's been taken away from the proven formula) are mixed blessings; they may maintain the appeal of the original 2D games but not without losing a lot of the gameplay's flavour too. Newcomers to the series will most likely enjoy what they find, but we suspect long-term fans will feel slightly let down.





COMPETENT, BUT TOO SHORT AND RESTRICTIVE

PIFF PAFF POOF

***Castlevania*'s magic system is based around the use of Orbs, Relics and sub-weapons – by combining them you can dish out all manner of pain on your adversaries. Relics can be used directly in conjunction with Leon's Magic Points to give him new skills for a limited time (such as enhanced attack or defence, invisibility and super speed). Orbs can be acquired by defeating the boss monsters of each area, after which you can use them to power up your sub-weapons; there are eight in total to find, offering numerous attacks that vary greatly in strength and usefulness. However, these cost you more Heart Points than usual and must be used in moderation as you travel around the castle.**

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

LOST AND FOUND: The 2D exploration factor has gone, replaced by level-based gameplay instead.

ON THE FLY: Using the right analog stick to access menus without pausing keeps the action flowing.

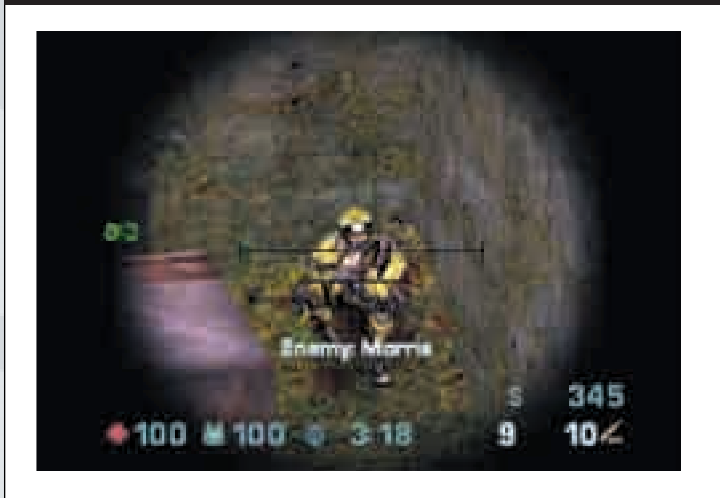
If you've played the older *Castlevania* games, some locations will look familiar.

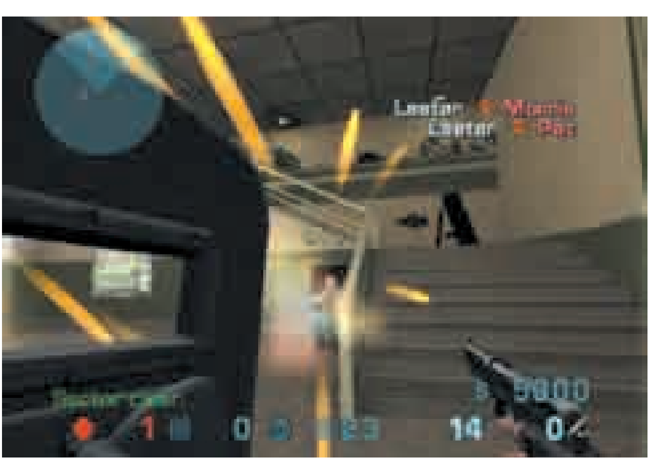
FAQs

Q. BETTER THAN BEFORE?
Yes, after a fashion. While hardcore fans will no doubt still be disappointed, it's certainly an improvement over the lacklustre N64 games.

Q. HOW BIG?
There are five areas you can access at your leisure, with a sixth opening up once you've completed them all. Sadly, doing that won't take you very long, but that doesn't include backtracking for the hidden bits.

Q. REPETITIVE ACTION?
A bit, although to be fair, the combat is a pretty reasonable translation of the 2D action. However, there's no real reason to kill anything unless you have to.





DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Valve

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4 (1-16 online)

LIVE'S 'KILLER APP' SEEMS TO HAVE LOST SOMETHING…

COUNTER-STRIKE

We're all for finding new homes for improved versions of the world's best games, but only on one condition – that the new title be at least as good as that which spawned it. As you can probably work out from the score at the bottom of the page, *Counter-Strike* has been telling us all about how a funny thing happened on the way to the Xbox, but our attention just keeps wandering. We want to love it, really we do, but by tearing it to pieces, removing all semblance of a single-player game and charging £40 for what is effectively a free, ageing PC download, Valve isn't making it easy for us to do so.

The main problem with this version of the seminal online shooter took a while to pin down, but after hours of on- and offline team play it hit us like an Arctic Warfare Magnum. Not only does this look nigh-on identical to the PC version (and therefore inferior to many Xbox titles), it still feels as though the two analogue sticks used to control your operative are but a placeholder for the mouse/keyboard combo that shot *Counter-Strike* to fame. But it still manages to capture the feel of the original game, and the sense of camaraderie, mortality and potential during team play, particularly with friends, remains a thing of beauty.

Call us naïve but when Microsoft announced the potential for downloadable content for its Xbox titles, we thought this would be new material. Instead, *Counter-Strike* chops out many of the finer levels and modes from an already lacklustre package – where are 747, Assault and the VIP levels? – only to offer these online later in a show of false generosity. For all its inherent flaws, though, this is still among the best experiences you'll get from Xbox Live, and even after all this time the ageing modes and maps easily rival anything that we've seen since the original release. Old maps like Italy and Dust still retain their charm after years of play, and the new additions bolster the roster wonderfully; it's just a shame that the single-player side of the game has been so horribly overlooked.

VERDICT 6/10
AN ONLINE GEM – ONE FOR LIVE PLAYERS ONLY

GHOST RECON



AS GOOD AS

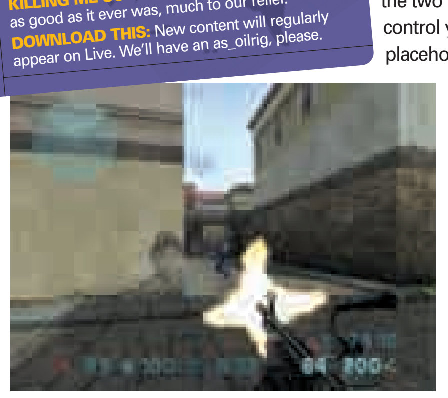
WORSE THAN

RAINBOW SIX 3

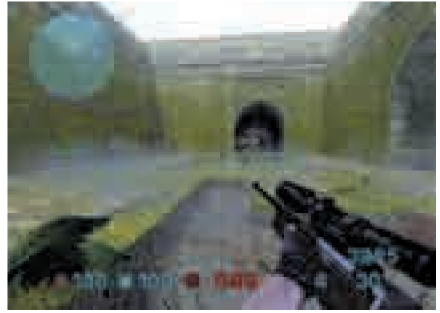
games™ **GLOBAL**

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

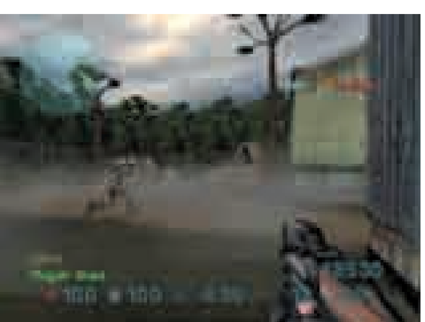
KILLING ME SOFTLY: Online play is pretty much as good as it ever was, much to our relief.
DOWNLOAD THIS: New content will regularly appear on Live. We'll have an as_oilrig, please.



Unsubtle it may be but we do have a soft spot for the Heavy Machine Gun – the perfect way to waste ammunition.



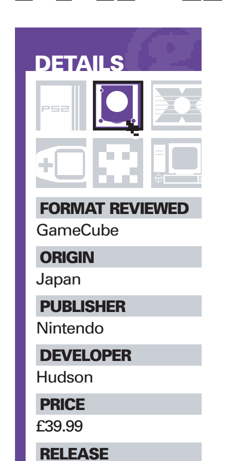
The Kevlar Suit is an optional accessory, but unlike those oh-so-ghetto hoop earrings this one could save your skin. Literally.



Offline play presents some questionable AI from the bots, but in Live mode it's hard to find fault with the anti-terrorist antics.

MARIO PARTY 5

PUT AWAY THE SLOW RECORDS, NINTENDO'S PARTY ISN'T OVER YET



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube
ORIGIN
Japan
PUBLISHER
Nintendo
DEVELOPER
Hudson
PRICE
£39.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1-4



Okay, we can probably guess what you're thinking – it's another *Mario Party* game, they're all same, why should you bother. We can read your thoughts, because they're the same ones we had when the game appeared out of the blue on Nintendo's release schedule. Yet though this initially looks identical to the previous *Party* games, it's pleasing to see that Nintendo seems to have listened to the critics when putting together *Mario Party 5*. Yes, we're as shocked as you are.

While the game offers the trademark mini-game action that the series always has, plenty of improvements have been made to the gameplay in areas that disappointed or annoyed in the last instalment. On the multiplayer front, these address everything from the issue of the board sections being uninteresting (character movement is faster and progress between mini-games is swifter) to the fairness of acquiring items. This second complaint is more tactfully dealt with through the addition of capsule machines that dish out random goodies for free as you go past – once you have an item, you can either spend coins to use it on yourself (to get a power-up, or steal an opponent's coins, for example), or you can place it somewhere on the board for someone to fall foul of should they land on it.

The biggest enhancements come in the single-player experience – always the worst part of the previous games, given that they were intended to be multiplayer titles. This time, Nintendo has clearly put some thought into it and come up with a Story mode that actually has a point, rather than being a player-vs-computer rehash of Party mode. Pitting you against Bowser's evil Koopa Kids on smaller versions of Party mode's boards, the task of ridding them of their coins through various duel-based games is far more enjoyable than you might think, particularly as the cut-down style of the game leaves very little time for you to get bored.

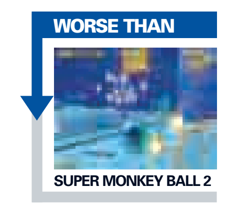
It's this major change to the gameplay (along with numerous additions, such as the extra bonus games like Beach Volleyball and Card Party, not to mention the 75 brand new mini-games) that makes *Mario Party 5* the best example of the series so far. Sure, it might still be a multiplayer game at heart, but by refining what's there and weeding out the weak points, Nintendo has turned what was becoming a stale idea into something worth investigating.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
FUN FOR ONE: The single-player experience has been revamped to make it more enjoyable for loners.
MINI MAYHEM: More extras and bonus games enhance the experience outside the main modes.

VERDICT 7/10
DIFFERENT ENOUGH TO MAKE IT THE BEST YET

MARIO PARTY 4

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

SUPER MONKEY BALL 2

The board sections are quicker than in the last instalment, so there's more time for mini-game antics.





These new capsule machines dish out items for free as you go past them, but it'll cost you coins if you want to use them on yourself.

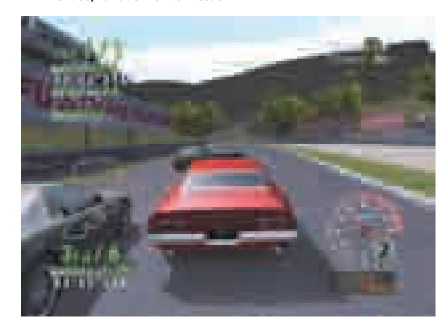


Single-player games pit you against the three evil Koopa Kids, with the aim to steal their coins and eliminate them as quickly as possible. Lone players should find this instalment of the *Party* series much more enjoyable as Nintendo has put more effort into the non-multiplayer sections.


eMag



With the catalogue of performance cars dating back as far as the Twenties, variation isn't an issue.



Diversity in vehicle handling is one of the series' strong points, although most models concentrate on raw power over steering.



While some may find the learning curve pretty daunting, getting the mightier machines under control can feel like a huge achievement.

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

CRAZY HORSES: The 167 performance cars offer the most untameable collection of horsepower yet.

BE THE BEST: Wager your finely-tuned machines from *GT 2002* in pink-slip races against other experts.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SEGA

DEVELOPER
WOW Entertainment

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
February '04

PLAYERS
1-4 (Up to 12 online)

SEGA GT ONLINE

CAN SEGA'S XBOX-ONLY RACER ESCAPE THE PROJECT GOTHAM SHADOW?

SEGA was plannng to have the Live-compatible evolution of its flagship driving sim on the shelves in time for Christmas. However, the developer's last-minute u-turn clearly had more than a little to do with the simultaneous release of a certain other Xbox-exclusive racer that was threatening to leave everything else on the starting grid.

The 'sequel' to *SEGA GT 2002* promises none of the grand overhaul seen in *Project Gotham Racing 2*, instead relying on the enticement of online play and a collection of subtler tweaks to shift copies. A £30 price tag indicates SEGA's reluctance to go head to head with *PGR2* in an either/or purchase decision, and by continuing the series' focus on total realism *GT Online* might just be able to sidestep any unflattering comparisons and be duly judged on its own merits.

While the masses flock to *PGR2*'s hype like moths to a flame, the more discerning driving connoisseurs who rose to the challenge of *GT 2002*'s demanding handling dynamics might well consider *PGR2*'s relative accessibility somewhat beneath their level of expertise. And now fans of the unforgiving authenticity that gives the *GT* series' gameplay such depth will be able to take on 11 similarly proficient players from around the world rather than the feeble multiplayer challenge presented by their unpractised mates. The ability to take your customised automotive monsters from *GT 2002* into the online arena adds to the appeal for devotees of the previous game, and the addition of 40 new cars gives players a further batch of high-powered beasts to tame. Taking the weird and wonderful collection of Thirties performance classics, futuristic prototypes and American muscle cars to 167 (a significantly higher tally than *PGR2*) the sheer variety is unsurpassed.

Sadly, though, progress since *GT*'s last spin around the track is simply too minimal to overlook, with a mere clone of 2002's game making up the bulk of offline play. The unmistakable quality persists but only the keenest fans are likely to find the online component draw enough to upgrade, while the same newbie-repelling difficulty as before may struggle to attract fresh followers.



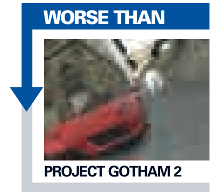
VERDICT 6/10
IT'S SEGA GT… BUT ONLINE

SEGA GT 2002



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



PROJECT GOTHAM 2

MEDAL OF HONOR: INFILTRATOR

IF ONLY THE REST OF THE SERIES WAS LIKE THIS

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
EA LA

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Since the Game Boy Advance came out, we've seen a handful of games prove that first-person shooters can work on a handheld console, *Doom* and *Ecks vs Sever* being just two examples. However, the thought of a *Medal Of Honor* game isn't really one that appeals – not just because the series has been rather lacklustre lately, but also because we played early code of such a game a while back and it didn't exactly blow us away. Thankfully, that game never came out and in its place we have *Infiltrator* – the first GBA *Medal Of Honor* game and a surprisingly decent one too.

That may, of course, have something to do with the fact that this isn't a straightforward FPS. Instead, EA has come up with a game that manages to combine ideas from shooters like *Metal Slug*, *Cannon Fodder* and *Commandos*, while still remaining true to the series' real-life military roots. Initially, the game looks just like any other top-down gung-ho shooter. Placing you in control of a single soldier through a number of campaign missions (each split into numerous stages), *Infiltrator* has you completing objectives by dashing through the landscape and gunning down anyone in your path. This in itself is no bad thing, and combined with the detailed visuals, speech and FMV scenes of real wartime footage, it all makes for a good first impression.

Play a little further into *Infiltrator*, though, and the gameplay suddenly becomes more demanding through the addition of stealth elements. Avoiding guards (so as not to set off the alarm, which brings more running) and performing close-range kills with the butt of your gun becomes far more important if you want to survive, as does making the right choice of weapons when you reach checkpoints. It's this need for tactical movement and planning ahead, along with the occasional side-scrolling *Operation Wolf*-style stage, that helps keep things interesting.

By being considerably different to the 'bigger' games in the series, *Infiltrator* is a title worthy of attention from fans and doubters alike, while still having enough links to real events to make it deserving of the *Medal Of Honor* moniker. Although the difficulty is a trifle harsh on occasion, it's still more than good enough to keep you coming back time and time again.



Sub-objectives aren't a priority, but you'll get bonus credit for completing them.

CONNECTED
games™
EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY
BAND OF BROTHERS: Link two GBAs and you can co-operate with your friends or fight against them.
PLAN AHEAD: Connect the GBA to *Rising Sun* on the Cube and you can use it as a real-time map.

BETTER THAN
MOH: RISING SUN



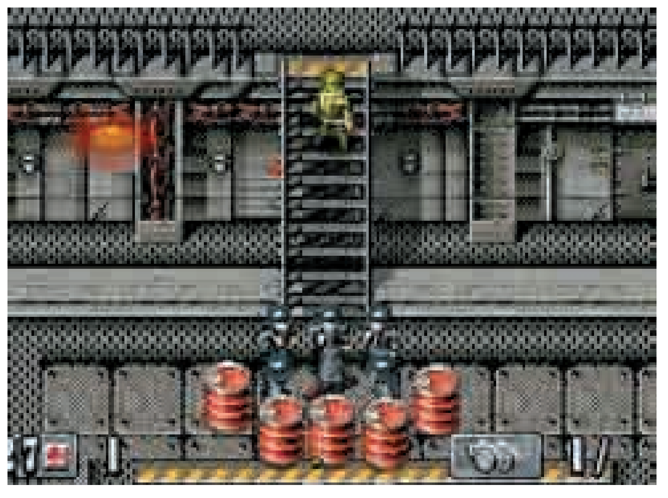
AS GOOD AS



CT SPECIAL FORCES 2

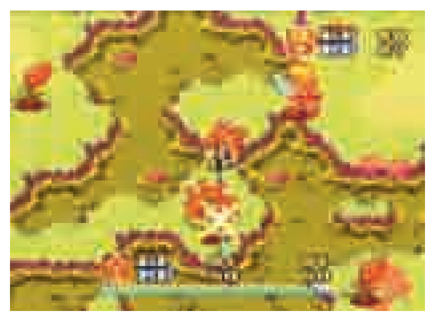
VERDICT 7/10
SURPRISINGLY GOOD, IF A LITTLE DIFFICULT







By choosing to concentrate your level points on a particular style, you can earn titles and improve the skills of your character.



Each enemy has a weakness to certain types of weapon, but it's only by destroying the creature that you can make a note of what it is.



Interaction with NPCs is essential if you want to find those hidden quests, but it lacks the certain something that makes such incidents interesting.

games™ CONNECTED

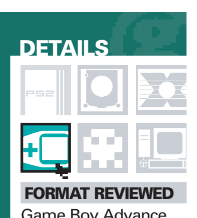
EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

TWO HEADS AND ALL THAT: Just as *Secret Of Mana* let you bring friends to help, so in *Sword Of Mana* you can link two GBAs and have each player control a character for maximum effectiveness.

THE POWER OF MANA ISN'T AS STRONG AS IT ONCE WAS…

SWORD OF MANA

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Brownie Brown

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Q1 '04 (US: Out Now)

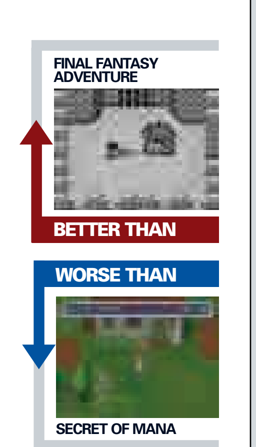
PLAYERS
1-2

Being the dedicated *Mana* fans that we are (*Secret, Legend,* whatever), it was inevitable that the announcement of a new title in the series would make us do backflips with joy. Of course, when we realised that the game was merely a remake of the very first game in the series, actually named *Final Fantasy Adventure*, it was also inevitable that our hearts would sink faster than a lead submarine. Another old console-to-GBA remake published by Nintendo; the ninth in the history of the handheld, if we've got our numbers right. Shocking.

Thankfully, something good has happened. Rather than release a straight conversion, Brownie Brown (an offshoot of Square Enix) took all the lessons learnt from the previous *Mana* titles and combined them to create a complete overhaul. Yes, so perhaps the story follows a similar path to that of the NES original, but the GBA game fleshes it out far more than we'd have thought possible. By allowing players to choose from either of the game's two heroes, *Sword Of Mana* alters the story accordingly so you can see it from both sides, as well as introducing several new characters and monsters that players of the previous titles will recognise. *Sword Of Mana* also uses the graphical style, combat and general interface of *Secret Of Mana* to create its world, ensuring that the tried-and-tested formula is easy to get into for fans and newcomers.

Yet while this may be great news for those expecting a half-arsed rehash, it's quite disappointing that the final product still doesn't quite feel as magical as we might have thought. Maybe it's the rather lacklustre music, the numerous side-quests that feel more bolted on than they should, or the forehead-slappingly stupid AI of the enemies and your companion, but the whole experience feels decidedly flat at times; not a good sign for a game that's supposed to absorb you into its world. There are also more than a few moments of sheer agony thrown up by the complex storyline – not least having to sit through a ten-minute-long cut-scene, only to get killed a minute after it finishes and then having to sit through it all again when the game restarts at your last save point. This is a real shame, as we had high hopes for what could have been a very special game. It's still a competent adventure but those looking for something a bit more inspired will probably be reaching for their SNES pads again.





SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT? MAYBE BEST NOT BOTHER, EH?

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE – OPERATION SURMA

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, GBA

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Atari

DEVELOPER
Paradigm

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

The least said about the last time we stepped into the shoes of a virtual Ethan Hunt the better. Taking its place alongside the likes of *Tomorrow Never Dies* in the movie tie-in hall of shame, part of the blame for such an ill-conceived showing had to be levelled at the restricting scene-by-scene adherence to its silver-screen counterpart. Clearly inspired by the success the 007 camp has enjoyed since shedding the shackles of a movie plot structure, this time Atari has penned a completely original adventure designed to make the most of the licence's gaming potential.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to get to the bottom of sinister goings on in the fictional Balkan republic of Yugaria and ultimately uncover a potentially devastating virus capable of hacking into any computer system around the globe. Armed with a suitably high-tech toolkit of gadgets and a repertoire of stealthy manoeuvres ripped straight from Sam Fisher, players must tiptoe their way around a selection of key enemy installations using every trick in the book to get the job done as quietly as possible. Yes, it's another watered-down *Splinter Cell* clone. Ethan is now able to hang from overhead pipes, hide bodies in the shadows and don his night-vision goggles at the touch of a button, but admittedly he does bring a selection of his own unique talents to the party. Stealth kills, for instance, can be pulled off from behind an enemy as usual, but also by dropping on them from above or lying in wait for them to round a corner, while an incredibly nifty Wasp camera can be remotely controlled to scout ahead and even take out guards with its electric sting.

Yet despite boasting an impressive box of tricks, the game's linear path simply cobbles together a series of disjointed hurdles for players to overcome with their gadgetry. Feeling more like a staggered set of obstacles than a wholesome game, the action sadly boils down to little more than a tediously dull showcase for your equipment and abilities, which are put into use against some questionable AI stooges.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
BEAT-'EM-UP: Ethan can resort to his fists and a single-button combo should his cover be blown.
HEARING VOICES: Ving Rhames reprises his movie role as your headset-based guardian, Luther.

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



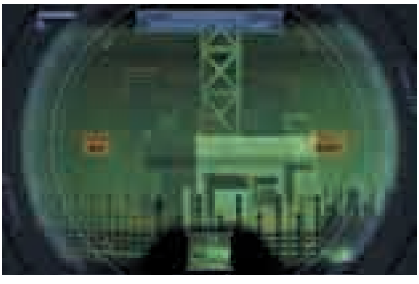
SPLINTER CELL



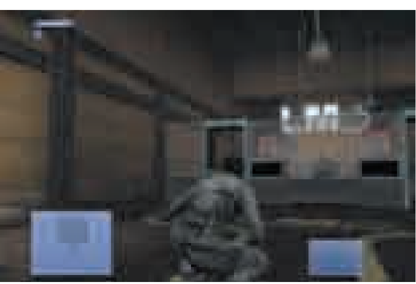
VERDICT 3/10
DILUTE, DISJOINTED AND UNINSPIRING



The storyline might have nothing to do with the movies, and Hollywood midget Tom Cruise has been replaced by a typically gruff-voiced videogame hero, but it just wouldn't be *Mission: Impossible* without a spot of good old vault dangling.

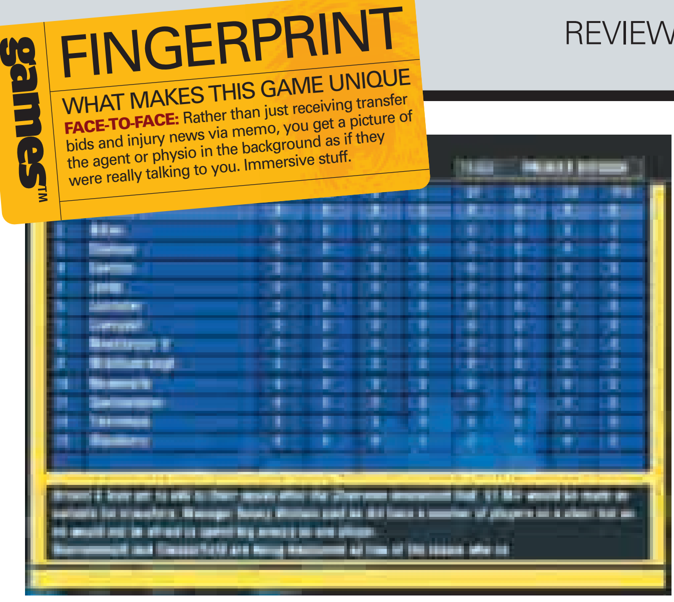


Your digital binoculars allow you to take pictures crucial to the mission. They'll also identify distant objects for you.



How are we going to get past this one? Surely there's not another gadget-based solution on the cards?

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
FACE-TO-FACE: Rather than just receiving transfer bids and injury news via memo, you get a picture of the agent or physio in the background as if they were really talking to you. Immersive stuff.





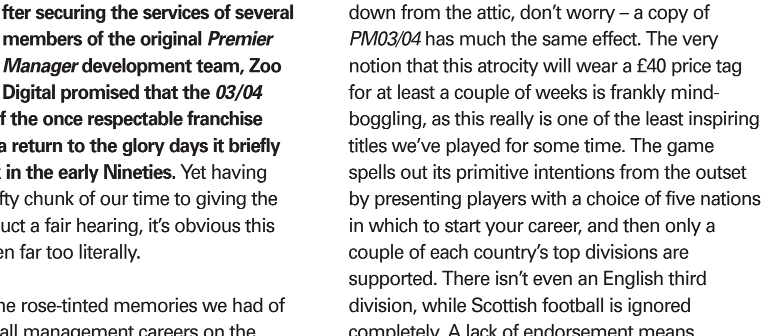
DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2
OTHER FORMATS
PC, GBA
ORIGIN
UK
PUBLISHER
Zoo Digital
DEVELOPER
In-House
PRICE
£39.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1-4

All your best-laid plans fall apart when you discover your players are completely mindless on the pitch.

PREMIER MANAGER 03/04

OUR TOP TIP FOR RELEGATION TO THE BARGAIN BIN



After securing the services of several members of the original *Premier Manager* development team, Zoo Digital promised that the *03/04* incarnation of the once respectable franchise would mark a return to the glory days it briefly enjoyed back in the early Nineties. Yet having devoted a hefty chunk of our time to giving the finished product a fair hearing, it's obvious this goal was taken far too literally.

Despite the rose-tinted memories we had of our football management careers on the Amiga, booting up the old dog and setting the first *Premier Manager* running is a stark reminder of how crude a simulation these games really were. For those reluctant to bring the Amiga down from the attic, don't worry – a copy of *PM03/04* has much the same effect. The very notion that this atrocity will wear a £40 price tag for at least a couple of weeks is frankly mind-boggling, as this really is one of the least inspiring titles we've played for some time. The game spells out its primitive intentions from the outset by presenting players with a choice of five nations in which to start your career, and then only a couple of each country's top divisions are supported. There isn't even an English third division, while Scottish football is ignored completely. A lack of endorsement means leagues and stadiums must endure fictional names, while erratic player attributes and even some notable absentees severely mar an already undersized database.

However, the real lack of substance is in the most crucial department – the match and tactical interface. Just how little influence it's possible to have over your team's tactics doesn't even warrant discussion as the abysmal AI shown by players in the dire 2D matches throws all your managerial hard work out of the window anyway. With such inauthentic match action we'd at least expect some glorious 3D eye candy to help disguise the fact, but not only does *PM03/04* feel like an Amiga game, it doesn't look a day under ten years old. We'd rather put £40 on Leeds to win the Premiership.

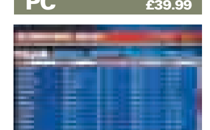


VERDICT 2/10
MAYBE TEN YEARS AGO…

GBA £29.99

With most of the PS2 features, this offers non-serious tacticians the same inauthentic fun it once did on the Amiga.

PC £39.99



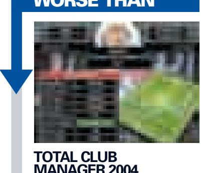
If you need an alternative to *Champ Manager*, the PC has no shortage of substitutes. This isn't one of them.

PREMIER MANAGER 3



AS GOOD AS

WORSE THAN



TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2004





DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
HAL

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Q1 '04

PLAYERS
1-4

Air Ride is possibly the most pick-up-and-play game we've seen this year. Perhaps too much so…

KIRBY AIR RIDE

MAN CANNOT LIVE ON ONE BUTTON ALONE

We're all for simplicity in games but there are times when it can be taken that little bit too far. A few genres certainly don't suffer because of it – puzzle games and rhythm action titles both thrive on minimal controls – but many other types of game can be left feeling shallow by a set-up that uses only a few buttons. Imagine our surprise, then, to find that the nauseatingly colourful *Kirby Air Ride* uses at most one button, and sometimes only the control stick. You see, all the craft in Dream World seem to be stuck on auto-accelerate, meaning that the big green A-button that dominates the face of the GameCube controller serves a double purpose. As well as applying the brakes, it also charges up a boost. Some vehicles play on this more than others (while some simply don't use it at all) but the system is inspired if nothing else.

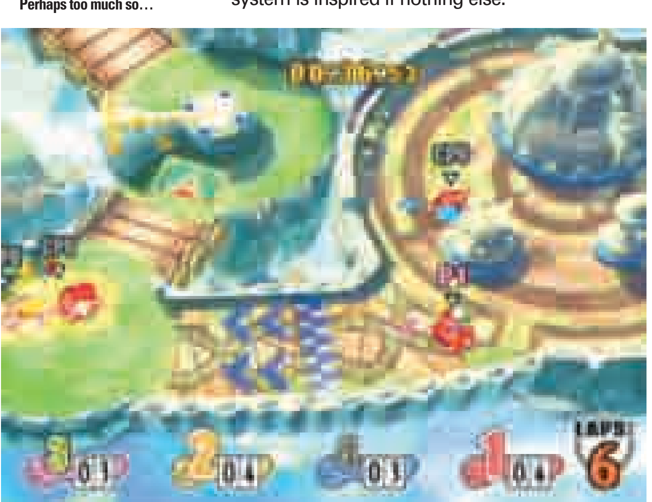
Bizarrely, this single-button set-up generally works quite well, though if it weren't for the remarkably varied handling of Kirby's many rides this might not have been the case. Unfortunately, it does make the game feel almost too 'pick up and play' (if such a thing were possible) and once you unlock a few of the simpler ships you won't even need to go near the trickier ones to secure first place. The presentation smacks of *Super Smash Bros Melee* and the system of unlocking options, modes and vehicles is definitely one of the finer aspects of the game – a grid of 120 bonuses per mode means that there's plenty to do, even if many of the tasks are identical while others are somewhat random.

games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

LAN OVERBOARD: It may not be the ultimate showcase for Nintendo's latest form of connectivity but *Kirby* players can link four GameCubes for some full-screen head-to-head action.

The three separate modes are presumably an attempt to keep the action from getting too repetitive, but, like the primary-school controls, this only works for a while before the simplicity just gets too much. Air Ride is the 'main' mode as it were, offering what can only be described as '*F-Zero* lite' gameplay across a relatively limited amount of courses. Top Ride is a simpler-still *Super Sprint* or *Skidmarks*-style affair over a similarly stingy number of tracks, while City Trial serves up some great ideas but is turned into a chore by the drawn-out execution. This game is big, chunky and bright but no amount of bold colours and cuddly enemies can save *Air Ride* from being a rather short-lived and simple affair.





VERDICT 5/10

ENJOYABLE IN MODERATION DESPITE ITS SIMPLICITY



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
Harmonix

PRICE
£49.99 (Import, with headset)

RELEASE
TBC (US/Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-8

IT'S NOT ONLY GIRLS THAT JUST WANNA HAVE FUN…

KARAOKE REVOLUTION

In defiance of *Private Eye*'s regular column denouncing people who say that 'brown is the new black' or 'cheese is the new rhubarb', we have to point out that karaoke is the new dancing (digitally speaking, at least). Dozens of developers and peripheral firms are already preparing for this predicted boom, Konami's effort is the first true karaoke videogame. And with the help of the talent behind *Frequency* and *Amplitude*, a new rhythm action star is born. Well, almost…

The technical side of *Karaoke Revolution* is nothing short of genius. Using the bundled headset mic, sung notes are detected and rated by the game with a staggering degree of accuracy. We'd expect no less from the combined talents of two of the most prolific names in music games, but even so, as the first mainstream title to do this we have to admit that this works far better than expected. Tunes come from the likes of Nickelback, Avril Lavigne and Michael Jackson, although the versions of the songs are, in true karaoke tradition, dubious homebrew covers that vary massively in quality. We'd have liked some kind of option to play reduced versions, though – wading through five minutes of a song you don't know or like can be something of a chore.

However, the main problem with *Karaoke Revolution* is one of range, and the list of over 30 songs throws in only a few old favourites among a lot of curveballs. This will probably change for the PAL release, but given how stripped down the *Dancing Stage* games are compared to their import *Revolution* brethren, it's with bated breath that we await *Karaoke Stage*. Similarly, while the booster discs are a great idea (see 'Connected'), you can't help feel that the starting song list may have suffered to facilitate these. Nevertheless, the technology that drives this is absolutely spot-on and, save for a few niggles (there can be problems with recognition on short notes), this is a unique gaming experience that shows promise for the future.

games™ CONNECTED
EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY
SONG FOR WHOEVER: Konami will beef up the song list for *Karaoke Revolution* with regular expansion discs. We don't know how much they'll cost, but it's better than a £40 game every six months.



Hit the highlighted notes and you'll get a Crowd Boost, multiplying your score and making you look pretty groovy.

DANCE: UK
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN
DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION EXTREME



VERDICT 6/10
A GREAT PERFORMER SINGING THE WRONG SET



Like A Virgin is an amusing inclusion, if only to see your drunken mates trying out their falsetto…

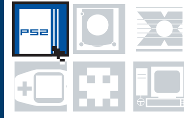


Some of the outfits and arenas are way over the top – we'd pay to see this young lady confront Mr Cowell.





DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Rockstar Games

DEVELOPER
Rockstar North

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

Mission objectives are usually in wide-open spaces, making them more dangerous to approach…

MANHUNT

VIOLENCE BEGETS VIOLENCE. AND NON-EXISTENT GAMEPLAY TOO

In a market where giving people what they want is the sure-fire route to success, it was inevitable that something like *Manhunt* was going to appear. Playing on the premise that violence sells, *Manhunt* revels in bloody decadence and has the balls to confront a taboo subject like snuff movies with such bluntness you may wonder how it ever got off the drawing board. Not that we've got a problem with this, of course – we've often succumbed to the base instinct of beating virtual characters to death for the sake of entertainment. But as you might have worked out from our score, we do have a sizeable bone to pick with Rockstar's latest 'mature' game. It's less about this mature side of things and more to do with the gameplay, or lack thereof… but we'll come to that shortly.

Aesthetically at least, *Manhunt* gets off to a good start by backing up its gruesome premise with plenty of edgy, atmospheric style. Portrayed entirely in 8mm-esque graininess (which helps cover up the slightly sub-par texturing in places), the story of James Earl Cash – convict-turned-plaything for twisted snuff director Starkweather – and his ultra-violent encounters with Carcer City's malevolent Hunters is one that has Rockstar North's prints all over it. This is a good thing, as the developer is more than capable of spinning a good yarn through a combination of interesting locales, suitable background music and quality voice acting – indeed, it's the vocal talent of actors like Brian Cox (the original Hannibal Lecter) that really gives the game that atmospheric edge it needs to get away with such brutal content.

FAQs

Q. VIOLENT, IS IT?
Stupid question – of course it's violent. Unfortunately, the gameplay hinges completely on this violence and, as such, gets rather tiresome after only a few levels.

Q. BUT THERE'S MORE, RIGHT?
Er, no, there isn't. No matter how it's worded, practically every mission is 'Kill everyone in the area and move on' – no more, no less.

Q. ATMOSPHERIC?
Certainly, although not to the extent that it's ever overly scary. Compared to games like *Project Zero*, it's not in the same league.







Face-to-face combat isn't advisable, particularly once you reach the later stages when the gangs hunt in packs rather than as single units.

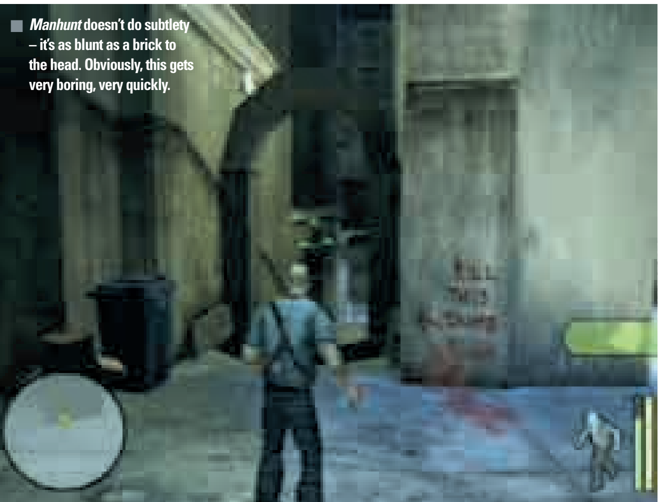
BULLY BONUS

Complete a scene in *Manhunt* and your performance will be graded out of five stars – how many you get depends on how long you took, the difficulty level you're on (either Fetish or Hardcore) and how stylish you were. Increasing your style points naturally requires you to perform more 'impressive' executions throughout the scene; melee weapons require you to hold down the button for longer while behind a Hunter, while firearms need to be used at close range. If you can survive each scene with a high enough grade, you'll unlock various bonus materials, such as genuinely interesting original concept art and designs, or a handful of pretty flaccid bonus missions that add nothing to the rest of the game.

While good looks are all very well, though, they're obviously not enough to make a good game on their own. Unfortunately, *Manhunt* makes them work damn hard, simply because they're the only thing to compensate for the gaping holes in the gameplay (or at least, what gameplay there is). What we have here are the absolute bare bones of the stealth genre mixed with shock video scenes that attempt to add flavour to the otherwise bland action. Essentially, the gameplay works as follows: track down a Hunter, get behind him, hold down the X-button… and, short of getting to watch a cut-scene featuring all kinds of gratifying death, that's it.

Things get slightly more complicated if you get spotted, as Cash's inability to hold his own in a fistfight means that the only real option is to run. Even so, escape is simply a matter of running into a designated 'shadowy' spot then waiting until the Hunters decide to stop looking for you. That won't take long either, as most of the time they'll stand right in front of you while shouting all manner of abuse, then give up and obligingly turn around so you can bump them off with the minimum of fuss. Combine this with the fact that virtually every mission in the game, no matter how it's worded, comes down to having to kill every Hunter in an area before you can move on, and it doesn't take long for things to get boring. Control-wise, it's also a fairly mixed bag. Cash's sneaking abilities are manageable but the hand-to-hand combat is poor at best – arguing that you're only supposed to use it as a last resort (this being a stealth game and all) isn't a valid excuse.

Falling foul of the 'style over content' trap that the *GTA* series has so far managed to avoid,



Manhunt doesn't do subtlety – it's as blunt as a brick to the head. Obviously, this gets very boring, very quickly.

Manhunt is a disappointment. Initially looking as though it could have plenty of promise, actually playing it for any length of time just reveals it to be unimpressive and dull. With things only really getting interesting about two-thirds through the game and everything before that being shallower than a puddle, we can't help but think that only gamers with the strongest of wills – or those simple enough to think that violence is 'cool' – will have the patience to plough through the tedium to find the relatively alright bits near the end. And yes, we said alright; not great or even good, just alright. No doubt the bloodthirsty masses will go crazy over this title (as has already been proved by the number of high-scoring reader reviews posted on the internet), but we like our violence a little more satisfying.

STATE OF EMERGENCY



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



TENCHU: WRATH OF HEAVEN

gamesTM **CONNECTED**

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

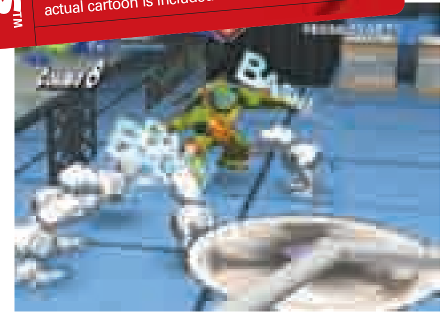
USE YOUR HEAD(SET): Much of the atmosphere comes via the headset. It lets Starkweather talk directly into your ear, and you can use the mic to make noise to lure Hunters towards you.

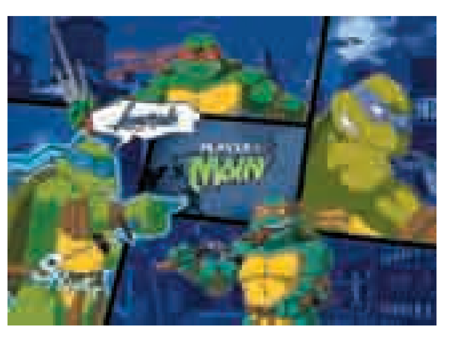
VERDICT 3/10

A GAMING CARCASS, BEREFT OF MEAT


eMag

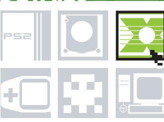








DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, GameCube, PC, GBA

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Feb '04 (Japan: TBC, US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

WILL KONAMI'S REPTILIAN OFFERING LEAVE YOU SHELL SHOCKED?

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

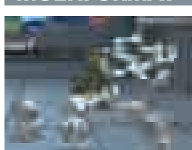
The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles are back, officially; new cartoons are on TV and plastic action figures are available in all good toy shops now. So it isn't really surprising that this resurgence in popularity should be accompanied by a new videogame. Developed by Konami (the company behind 1991's popular *Turtles In Time* arcade game), this latest offering follows the structure of a classic scrolling beat-'em-up. Levels are broken up into zones by invisible walls, and every enemy must be destroyed within the area before a 'Go' arrow indicates that it's time to move on. To make things a little more interesting, the four turtles fight in different martial arts styles, and many of the enemies have their own attack patterns. Unfortunately, despite Konami's efforts to diversify progression, the action is a little too samey, and things become just too repetitive.

Veteran gamers may recall how the standard levels in some of the older *Turtles* games were interspersed with hoverboard sections and suchlike, but there's nothing of the sort here. Aside from scenery variations, FMV cut-scenes and the odd boss fight, the game is practically the same from start to finish. Of course, with virtually no other scrolling beat-'em-ups on the market today, it's difficult to compare it to any other current title, though it's certainly no better than the likes of *Final Fight* or *Streets Of Rage* were all those years ago.

Thankfully, as far as visuals go, *TMNT* can't be faulted. Featuring some of the best cel-shading we've ever seen, the game is a perfect replica of the cartoon, while simultaneously keeping in step with current videogame trends. In fact, the game looks so good that it makes you want to keep playing, if only to see what the next area has in store. As it stands, then, Konami's latest *Turtles* game doesn't do anything particularly innovative, though it's perfectly playable and looks great. It's a big shame that it doesn't include a four-player mode, but at least for two players there's lots of fun to be had. Perhaps if Konami develops a sequel the designers will iron out a few of the flaws mentioned here. As for this instalment, things could have been a whole lot worse.

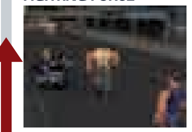


MULTIFORMAT



Apart from the obvious limitations of the GBA, every version of *TMNT* is practically identical. Multiple console owners should choose based on their favoured control pad.

FIGHTING FORCE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



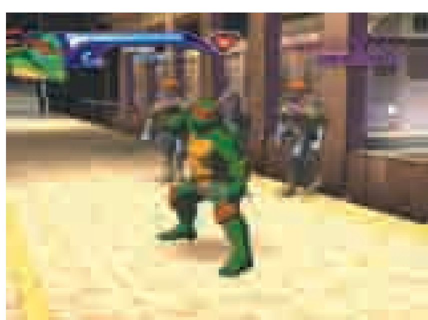
TMNT (ARCADE)



Much of the action, with its 'Bash' and 'Thok' effects, is reminiscent of the Sixties *Batman* TV series, only far more violent.



The action is broken up by cut-scenes, some of which are in real time, the others in FMV. It's like the cartoon never went away…



Some of the enemies have been lifted straight from the cartoon, and each Turtle's individual fighting style should be familiar too.





SCORE 00000

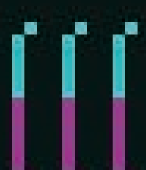
items

energy





Look! It's the Goodyear blimp! **Dynamite Dan Amstrad CPC/C64/Spectrum ZX [Mirrorsoft] 1985**




eMag


A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.14 JANUARY 2004
00p
RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
GAME GEAR
Have Your Batteries Ready!
BOYS TOYS
Micro Machines 2 - The Greatest Retro Game Ever?
GRAB YOUR CHOPPER!
Why Don't They Remake Paperboy?
PLUS! RETRO ADS OF YESTERYEAR!
BANG BANG!
IT'S THE LIGHTGUN FAMILY TREE
MONTHLY ALL-FORMAT RETRO GAMES FUN!
BAD BOXES
THEY'RE A WORK OF ART! (SORT OF)
BUY AND SELL YOUR OLD GAMES IN GTM!

Retro News

FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE HERE AND NOW OF RETRO GAMING…

With so many classic game licences ripe for resurrecting, it's not surprising that the last year has seen so many sequels. Retro Studios brought back *Metroid* in style, and Ubisoft has proved that *Prince Of Persia* works just as well in three dimensions as it did in two. It's seems strange, though, that so many companies should chose to remake popular retro titles, only to release a complete mess of what was once a good game.

In this issue we've looked at how great it would be if Atari brought back *Paperboy*, though we've taken into account the changes that might need to be made for it to be a hit. So you can imagine how dismayed we were when we saw the first screenshots of SEGA's 3D Ages range on PS2 – most of the games are laughable. So to all developers and publishers, think carefully if you're going to resurrect a classic – just one weak link can break an entire chain.

Keith Edwards, Retro Editor

This Has To Be A Yoke, Er, Joke

Is Blitz about to whisk Dizzy off to the realms of 3D? Stranger things have happened…



It appears that the Oliver Twins and Codemasters have finally settled their differences and are about to collaborate on a brand new *Dizzy* game for the next generation. Although Blitz is keen to point out that "there isn't a *Dizzy* game currently in production," the firm has put together a showreel of what the prince of the Yolk Folk might look like in 3D. The footage can be seen at www.fantasticdizzy.co.uk, and anyone can leave constructive criticism or sign a petition to bring him back.

We're not so sure that the successful 2D formula would convert well to three dimensions without some serious tweaking, and judging by the footage we're not wrong. In all fairness, though, what's on offer doesn't really demonstrate how a 3D version of *Dizzy* would play, but merely how it might look.

Then again, judging by Blitz's last platform gaming attempt, *Taz Wanted*, perhaps we should be more worried about the gameplay than the aesthetics…



▲ Dizzy in 3D? It doesn't look too promising here, but it could work. Maybe. Don't you think?

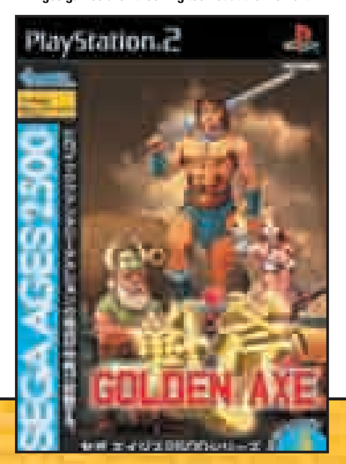
Old For New

SEGA's 3D Ages confirmed for the UK

SEGA has finally confirmed that its recent range of classic game updates on PS2 will be coming to the UK sometime in 2004. Created by 3D Ages, a subsidiary company of SEGA and D3 Publishing, the series already includes classic titles such as *Virtua Racing* and *Out Run*, with other popular games to be added to the line-up as time goes by. The first games to reach these shores will be *Space Harrier*, *Golden Axe*, *Fantasy Zone*, *Monaco GP* and *Phantasy Star Collection*, each reprogrammed to take advantage of the PlayStation2's 3D processors.

Sadly, from what we've seen so far, the games on offer look like PSone Net Yaroze projects, rather than professionally developed titles created specifically for a current-generation console. This is especially true of *Out Run*, which actually looks far worse than the original sprite-based arcade game. We're keeping our fingers crossed that things will have been sorted out by the time the games go on sale here.

▼ Don't be fooled by the pretty artwork, the SEGA 3D Ages games aren't looking too hot at the moment.



Advanced Emulations

Handheld retro fun

Clever people on the internet have discovered that a multitude of retro systems can easily be emulated on the Game Boy Advance. Seeing as Nintendo has already released numerous NES games for the system on e-Card, it's not really surprising that the company's classic 8-bit console is among the machines being emulated. Most NES games work perfectly in single-player, but, impressively, it's even possible to link two GBAs together for multiplayer games.

However, we're more excited about playing Spectrum, Master System and arcade games, all of which have been emulated to some degree of success. Unfortunately, anyone wishing to play emulated games on GBA will need to buy an expensive Flash Card Advance Linker and have the knowledge to download the ROMs.

This Month In 1990

While the Eighties saw gaming companies come and go, the Nineties were even more interesting. Things started well for Nintendo with the SNES, though other companies that had once been successful struggled to stay competitive…

GAMING NEWS JAN '90

Atari In And Out Of Pocket

Although Atari had tried hard to stay afloat throughout the latter half of the Eighties, 1990 saw the company attempting to muscle its way back into the market again, this time with its Lynx handheld system. On 6 January at the Winter Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, the company demonstrated the machine in all its glory.

A monster of a portable games system, the original Lynx was no less than 25cm wide by 10cm high, and featured an impressive 9cm colour screen. It had been engineered by the same two designers who had been behind the Commodore Amiga and it used a powerful 16-bit central processor that ran at 16MHz.

Unfortunately, like SEGA's Game Gear (see pages 144-148), it required six AA batteries that lasted for around four hours, or less if you were using rechargeables. Obviously, this was a big drawback for a machine that was supposed to be portable.

Predictably, the system wasn't hugely successful, despite a fairly solid selection of decent games being released for it. At $149, it was a similar price to the Game Gear (which launched a year later), but SEGA's line-up of quality software eclipsed most Lynx titles. And it was barely even worth comparing it to the Game Boy – Nintendo's hugely popular handheld console was cheaper, far more portable and had a massive library of affordable games.



▲ Despite being a powerful little machine with a colour screen, the Lynx didn't sell that well.


▲ The Lynx wasn't short of quality titles, but SEGA's Game Gear eclipsed it after a year.

UK Charts For Jan 1990

1. **Hangin' Tough** – New Kids On The Block
2. **Get A Life** – Soul II Soul
3. **When You Come Back To Me** – Jason Donovan
4. **Touch Me** – 49ers
5. **Got To Get** – Rob 'n' Raz Featuring Leila K
6. **Got To Have Your Love** – Mantronix Featuring Wondress
7. **Tears On My Pillow** – Kylie Minogue
8. **The Magic Number/Buddy** – De La Soul
9. **Do They Know It's Christmas?** – Band Aid II
10. **Dear Jessie** – Madonna

Top movies in America, 1990

Home Alone
$285,761,243

Ghost
$217,631,306

Dances With Wolves
$184,208,848

Pretty Woman
$178,406,268

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
$135,270,000

The Hunt For Red October
$120,709,868

Kindergarten Cop
$91,457,688

Back To The Future Part III
$87, 666, 629

Days Of Thunder
$82, 670, 733

The Godfather: Part III
$66,676,062

I·N T·H·E N·E·W·S

CRICKET CRISIS FOR GATTING'S TOURISTS

South Africa was in the news this month as Mike Gatting defied international condemnation and visited the country with a team of cricketers. The former England cricket captain and his squad of 'tourists' were met with angry protests when they landed in Johannesburg on 19 January. Several hundred protestors, including the wife of jailed Nelson Mandela, had been waving banners at Jan Smuts airport before the team touched down. By the time the squad arrived, three hours late, police had moved in with tear gas and batons.

Gatting's team travelled to segregated South Africa in spite of the economic and cultural sanctions that were imposed on the country at the time. Worldwide indignation at South Africa's policy of apartheid had seen the suspension of many trade links with the country, though the tour's organisers said their intention was merely to raise the profile of the game.


▲ Gatting, batting. And, er, inciting riots and stuff.



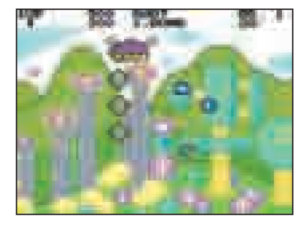
Why Don't They Remake…

This Month's Favourites

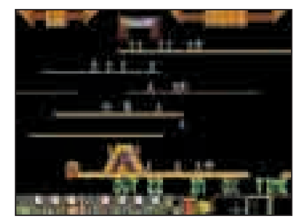
DOOM
We very much doubt that *Doom III* will be able to match the quality of the original game, which is still as playable as it ever was.



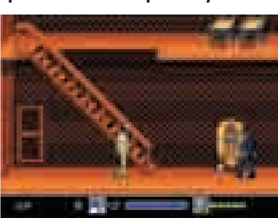
FANTASY ZONE
It may look like a kid's game, but *Fantasy Zone* is actually rock hard. As shoot-'em-ups go, it's simple but extremely addictive.



LEMMINGS
It's amazing to think how popular *Lemmings* once was, yet now it's nowhere to be seen. That awful 3D remake probably killed it.



MOONWALKER
SEGA's Mega Drive version of *Moonwalker* may have been a flawed game, but it captures the spirit of the movie perfectly.



PAPERBOY

GRAB YOUR CHOPPER AND TAKE TO THE STREETS

Released: **1984**
Publisher: **Atari Games**
Developer: **Atari Games**
Format: **Arcade, home systems**

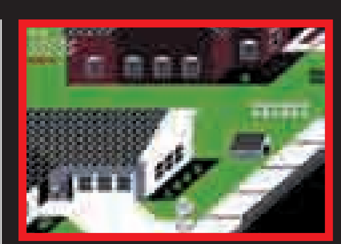
The original *Paperboy* arcade game, released in 1984, was a massive hit thanks to its unique gameplay and eye-catching handlebar controller. The aim of the game was simply to cycle up a street, throwing newspapers at houses while avoiding pedestrians, animals, potholes and other such life-threatening obstacles. Sure it was basic, but it was nearly 20 years ago. Besides, just because it was simplistic didn't mean it wasn't great fun to play.

But what would happen if Atari remade the game now? Well, unless it was a straight port to a handheld the formula would almost certainly have to be expanded in order for it to compete with today's offerings. Saying that, there's absolutely no reason why RPG elements couldn't be integrated, allowing you access to more advanced vehicles and harder challenges.

For example, by saving up cash earned delivering papers, the player could earn a motorcycle licence and move up to pizza delivery. Obviously, the ultimate goal would be to become a Fed-Ex employee, perhaps even earning a pilot's licence and flying parcels to destinations all around the world. There could even be an online mode in which players have to get deliveries to their destinations ahead of each another.

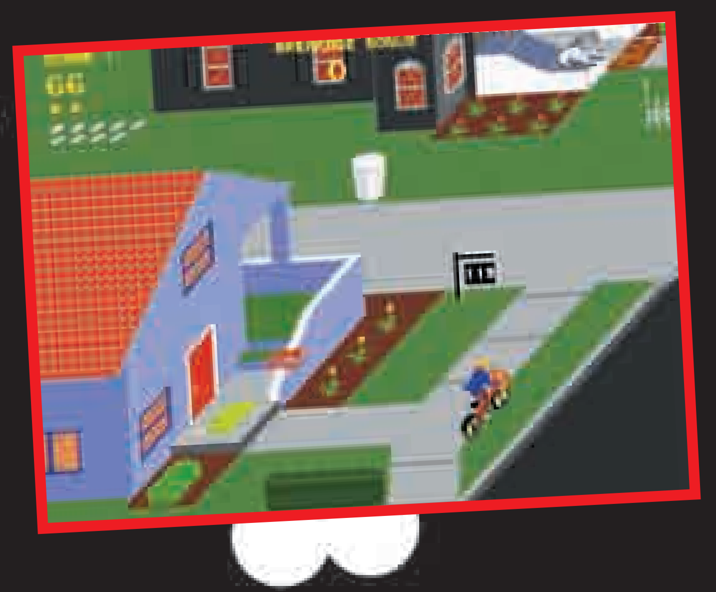
Of course, these days it might be difficult for such a game to compete with the likes of *Grand Theft Auto*, which has famously taken occupation-based games in a much darker direction. Would anyone really want to drop off parcels when they could be screeching around the same city shooting people and stealing cars? Well according to our research (based on the opinions of six members of the **games**™ team), 67 per cent of gamers would…

Then again, Atari could always produce a game that combines EyeToy and CyberRider technology. We're quite sure that peddling to go faster while waving your hands to deliver newspapers would make for an entertaining gaming experience, and a handy fat-burning exercise…





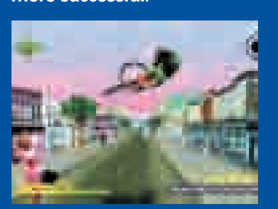
▲ *Paperboy* was a classic title that gamers all around the world enjoyed. But would people go for it now? Obviously, it would look much better, but would the style of gameplay appeal to anyone?





CRISIS ZONE

Back in 1997, BMG released a game called *Courier Crisis* that included some of the delivery-game features we've been talking about. Sadly, the title lacked polish, and many gamers felt that the cities on offer were far too similar. Of course, the game was running on PlayStation and Saturn hardware, so the graphical capabilities were somewhat restrictive for the designers. We're fairly sure that if a company were to create a similar title today, it would almost certainly be more successful.



S·U·P·E·R B·O·M·B·E·R·M·A·N



▲ Although *Bomberman* was released for many different formats, most gamers are familiar with the standard *Super* variation on the SNES. Even so, *Saturn Bomberman* is commonly the favourite with hardcore players.

Format: **Various Home Systems**
Publisher: **Hudson**
Developer: **In-House**
Release Date: **1993-2002**

Over the years there have been a handful of games that offer a totally unique multiplayer experience, *Super Mario Kart*'s Battle mode being a prime example. But while a number of titles could easily be nominated to win the multiplayer prize, few gamers would disagree that *Bomberman* would at least make it to the finals, possibly even to the winner's rostrum.

Just in case you've somehow managed to miss this classic series, the premise was simply to destroy your rivals by laying bombs in a maze, before quickly hiding around a corner to avoid the blast. The size of the explosion depended purely on how many power-ups you'd discovered hidden in the walls, as did the number of bombs you could drop at any one time. Other power-ups included the ability to jump over walls and the strength to push bombs back towards those who had dropped them. On top of that, each arena offered a slightly different theme, often with its own gameplay variations, while coloured dinosaurs known as Louies gave players the chance to withstand an explosion without dying.

Because four players could battle simultaneously (ten in the SEGA Saturn version), *Bomberman* was regularly the game of choice whenever groups of friends wanted to compete against each other. And unlike many newer games it was possible to become highly skilled, with matches regularly lasting until one player was crushed by falling blocks that would gradually fill up the playing area as the time ran out. If you were cunning enough to win outright, though, the opportunity to gloat was irresistible. That's why winning *Bomberman* joins our ever-growing list of great retro gaming moments.

HAVEN'T WE MET BEFORE?

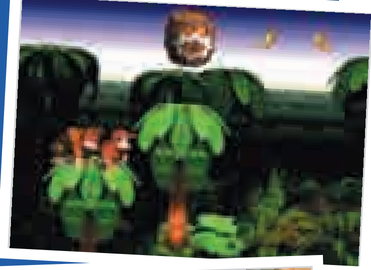


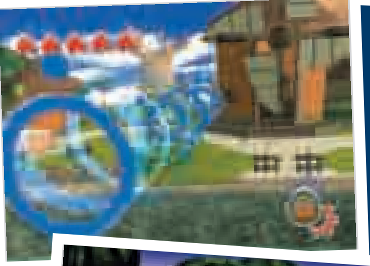
EVER HAD THAT FEELING THAT YOU'VE ALREADY PLAYED A GAME, EVEN THOUGH YOU KNOW YOU HAVEN'T? LIKE BILLY HATCHER, PERHAPS?

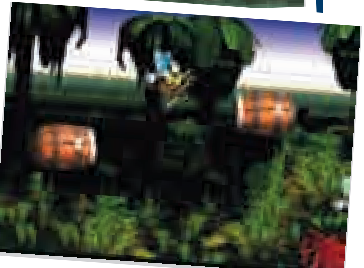
Sonic Team usually produces unique games, but when we were playing *Billy Hatcher And The Giant Egg* on the GameCube recently, we couldn't help being reminded of *Donkey Kong Country* on the SNES. On the face of it they're completely different games, of course – *Billy Hatcher* is all about rolling eggs around a 3D environment, while *DKC* was a traditional 2D scrolling platform game. But look a little closer and there's a key gameplay element which is present in both – one which works better in the older of the two games, funnily enough.

You may remember how in *DKC* there were floating barrels that fired the characters across the screen. Some of these used predetermined paths, while others required a button press at the precise moment when the desired location was in the line of fire. *Billy Hatcher* makes use of almost the exact same gameplay mechanics, though the barrels have been replaced with brightly coloured rings that propel both BIlly and his Egg through the air.

Of course, it's worth remembering that the barrels in *Donkey Kong Country* were there purely to tie in with the original *Donkey Kong* arcade game, in which Kong would throw barrels at Jump Man (who later became Mario, of course). Quite what coloured rings have to do with either chickens or eggs, on the other hand, is beyond us.













Street Fighter: The Movie

Just when you thought Street Fighter couldn't get any better, it didn't

You've heard of the game of the film, or even the film of the game, but how about the game of the film of the game? It sounds ridiculous, but in 1994 it seemed like a good idea to Capcom. The company's run of *Street Fighter* games had been inconceivably popular and the top designers at the firm were considering the best direction in which to take the series. Naturally, the obvious choice would have been to make the switch to 3D – *Virtua Fighter* and *Tekken* were already on the market and proving that such a formula could be extremely successful, while most of *Street Fighter*'s 2D competitors were already shrinking into niches.

But this was a strange year for the industry. The 3DO had failed to do the business, and with the PlayStation and Saturn having only just launched, many of the industry's biggest players were having to relearn their trade to cater for this new generation of polygon-pushing powerhouses. Even *Resident Evil*, released in 1996, only featured a minimal amount of 3D calculation. Of course, all these excuses simply don't justify the abomination that Capcom unleashed on the unsuspecting public in the summer of 1995.

December 1994 had seen the American cinema release of *Street Fighter: The Ultimate Battle* – a truly appalling movie loosely based around the game. It was perhaps inevitable that a tie-in game would also be released, but few could have predicted that Capcom would produce something equally as flawed as the film itself. You see, *Street Fighter: The Movie* (the game) didn't feature traditional hand-drawn characters like the previous games, nor did it embrace the wonders of polygons. Instead Capcom went with the *Mortal Kombat* way of doing things, digitising all the actors from the movie in sprite form, and animating them in front of cut-out photographs of the locations. The results were, in all honesty, laughable.

The problem was that a lack of animation frames made the movement look fragmented and unnatural – something that was all the more noticeable with the semi-photo-realistic fighters. Midway had avoided such issues in *Mortal Kombat* by cutting down the number of moves that each character had, as well as featuring multiple fighters that were essentially the same as one another, only in different colours. *Street Fighter* players, on the other hand, were used to three punches, three kicks and a wide range of variations on those six attacks, and there was no way that Capcom could somehow scrimp on the number of characters included.

Interestingly, *Street Fighter: The Movie* is now one of the most expensive *Street Fighter* arcade boards to get hold of, with chipsets going for as much as £100 on eBay. If you do wish to play this, though, – something which we don't recommend – you could always pick up a copy of either the PlayStation or Saturn conversion for under a tenner.

A Dream Cast

Despite its shockingly poor storyline and special effects, *Street Fighter: The Ultimate Battle* actually featured quite a few big-name stars. Brussels muscleman Jean-Claude Van Damme was at the forefront of the action as Guile, while pop princess Kylie Minogue played British spy Cammy.

Incidentally, for all you Kylie admirers out there, it was apparently the arduous physical training that the Aussie star had to do for *Street Fighter* that taught her how to keep her valuable behind looking so pert. So perhaps something good did come out of the movie after all.

Unfortunately, for other members of the cast, things didn't turn out quite as well. Raul Julia, famous for his portrayal of Gomez in the *Addams Family* films, was signed up to play M. Bison in the film, despite having been diagnosed with cancer in 1993. Sadly, the Puerto Rican actor passed away in October 1994, missing the launch of *Street Fighter* by two months.





PERSIAN PRINCESS, PALACES, & PRISONS...

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An outstanding challenge of an outstanding game!

'This is what Game Gear owners have been crying out for. Plenty of action, great grafics and absorbing gameplay.

ALSO AVAILABLE ON MASTER SYSTEM

... PROGRAMMING PERFECTION.





Prince Of Persia (Game Gear) Domark, 1992 – UK advertisement

LIGHTGUN FAMILY TREE

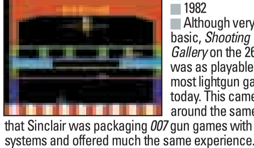
If there's one videogame genre that's been around since gaming began, it's the lightgun game. While never at the cutting edge of game design, many of the titles that fall into this category offer a pure gaming experience that just about anyone can pick up and play.

SHOOTING GALLERY/SHOOT OUT/DOGFIGHT/PREHISTORIC SAFARI

- Magnavox Odyssey
- 1972
- Despite being the first console ever released, the Magnavox Odyssey offered a wide range of games, including ones that used a lightgun. The gun looked like a prop from a Wild West movie and was very accurate.

MARKET GROWS

SHOOTING GALLERY



- Atari 2600
- 1982
- Although very basic, *Shooting Gallery* on the 2600 was as playable as most lightgun games today. This came out around the same time that Sinclair was packaging *007* gun games with its systems and offered much the same experience.

DUCK HUNT

- NES
- 1984
- One of the most memorable lightgun games, *Duck Hunt* offered two game modes and featured all the charm you'd expect from a Nintendo game. And who could forget that sniggering dog which laughed whenever you missed a shot.

WILD GUNMAN

- NES/Arcade
- 1984
- While this wasn't a particularly big seller, it's gone on to attract something of a cult following thanks to its brief cameo appearance in *Back To The Future Part II*. It let you take out one or more rivals in a Wild West shoot-out.

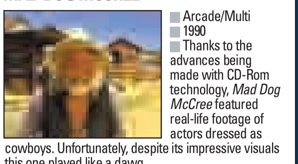
MOVIE TIE-INS

ALIEN³: THE GUN



- Arcade
- 1993
- Looking somewhat dated at the time, *Alien³: The Gun* captured the spirit of the film by throwing hundreds of alien sprites around the screen as the on-rails action took the player on a ride through a maze of metal corridors.

MAD DOG MCCREE



- Arcade/Multi
- 1990
- Thanks to the advances being made with CD-Rom technology, *Mad Dog McCree* featured real-life footage of actors dressed as cowboys. Unfortunately, despite its impressive visuals this one played like a dawg.

POLICE

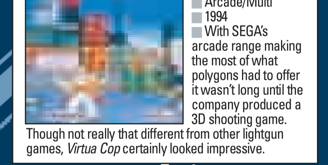
LETHAL ENFORCERS

- Arcade/Multi
- 1993
- Konami released lightgun game *Lethal Enforcers* in 1993. More serious and realistic than most of the company's titles at that time, the game used digitised sprites to represent criminals popping up from behind the scenery.

LETHAL ENFORCERS 2

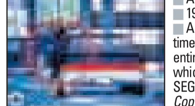
- Arcade/Multi
- 1994
- Although the experience offered by *Lethal Enforcers 2* was much the same as the original, the theme was now the Wild West. Despite its sprite-based visuals, the game was infinitely more playable than *Mad Dog McCree*.

VIRTUA COP



- Arcade/Multi
- 1994
- With SEGA's arcade range making the most of what polygons had to offer it wasn't long until the company produced a 3D shooting game. Though not really that different from other lightgun games, *Virtua Cop* certainly looked impressive.

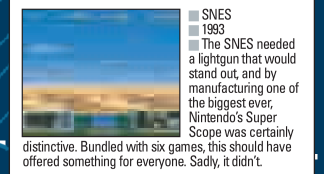
VIRTUA COP 2



- Arcade/Multi
- 1995
- A year isn't a long time to produce an entirely new game, which explains how SEGA got *Virtua Cop 2* out so soon after the original. More of an extension than a sequel, this was essentially more of the same blasting action.

HORROR

SUPER SCOPE 6



- SNES
- 1993
- The SNES needed a lightgun that would stand out, and by manufacturing one of the biggest ever, Nintendo's Super Scope was certainly distinctive. Bundled with six games, this should have offered something for everyone. Sadly, it didn't.

YOSHI'S SAFARI

- SNES
- 1993
- As the only other game available for the Super Scope, *Yoshi's Safari* used the SNES's Mode 7 effect to draw various pseudo-3D terrains. The objective was to guide Yoshi's tongue towards the enemies by aiming and shooting with the gun.

BIG GUNS

POINT BLANK

- Arcade/PSone
- 1994
- Somewhere between Nintendo's *Super Scope 6* and *Mario Party*, Namco's *Point Blank* offered numerous mini-games that relied on sharp shooting, rapid fire and quick thinking. This comedy game was called *GunBullet* in Japan.

THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD



- Arcade/Multi
- 1996
- Taking the *Virtua Cop* formula and mixing it with the style of a horror B-movie, *House Of The Dead* appealed to arcade-goers with its high level of gore and detachable zombie limbs. A cut-down version was later released for the SEGA Saturn.

TIME CRISIS

- Arcade/PSone
- 1996
- With many of Namco's games borrowing ideas from SEGA, this could have been a straight clone of *Virtua Cop*. However, the game introduced a foot pedal that gave players the chance to duck and hide behind segments of the scenery.

DIE HARD TRILOGY

- PSone/Saturn
- 1996
- With the *Die Hard* licence, Probe Entertainment took the three films and developed three distinctly different games in a single package. The second film in the series was a lightgun game that was clearly influenced by *Virtua Cop*.

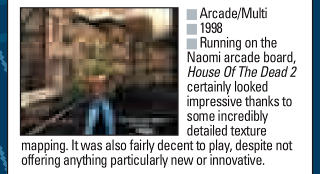
CRYPT KILLER

- Arcade/Multi
- 1997
- Considering that this was released by Konami in 1997, the visuals were absolutely laughable. Using a combination of digitised spites and polygons, this took the horror theme and slotted it somewhere between *Lethal Enforcers* and *Die Hard*.

THE LOST WORLD

- Arcade
- 1997
- Showcasing SEGA's powerful Model 3 arcade technology, *The Lost World* looked very similar to the *Jurassic Park* movies. Nothing new in terms of gameplay, the deluxe cabinet looked like a Land Rover with blacked-out windows.

THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD 2



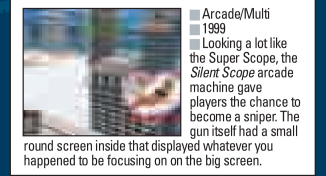
- Arcade/Multi
- 1998
- Running on the Naomi arcade board, *House Of The Dead 2* certainly looked impressive thanks to some incredibly detailed texture mapping. It was also fairly decent to play, despite not offering anything particularly new or innovative.

TIME CRISIS 2



- Arcade/PS2
- 1998
- *Time Crisis 2* bettered the original game by offering a two-player mode. The original's method of ducking with the foot pedal had meant that only one player could use the screen at a time. This sequel allowed two cabinets to be linked.

SILENT SCOPE

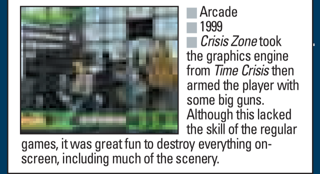


- Arcade/Multi
- 1999
- Looking a lot like the Super Scope, the *Silent Scope* arcade machine gave players the chance to become a sniper. The gun itself had a small round screen inside that displayed whatever you happened to be focusing on on the big screen.

POINT BLANK 2

- Arcade/PSone
- 1999
- There's not really a lot we can say about *Point Blank 2* that we didn't say about the original (the joy of sequels). This let two players compete in a number of comedy events that tested all the different kinds of skills required to shoot things effectively.

CRISIS ZONE

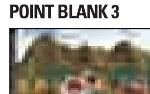


- Arcade
- 1999
- *Crisis Zone* took the graphics engine from *Time Crisis* then armed the player with some big guns. Although this lacked the skill of the regular games, it was great fun to destroy everything on-screen, including much of the scenery.

SILENT SCOPE 2

- Arcade
- 2000
- Like so many other arcade franchises, the sequel to *Silent Scope* was almost indistinguishable from the original game. This one in particular was so similar that it barely seemed worth producing it at all.

POINT BLANK 3



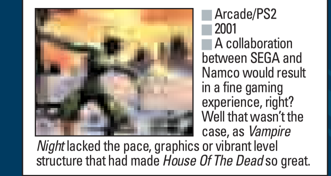
- Arcade
- 2000
- Although this quirky little Namco series was great fun, by the time the third instalment was released it was all seeming a little samey. Certainly no worse than its predecessors, this was far too similar to earn any real positive praise.

RESIDENT EVIL: GUN SURVIVOR



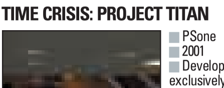
- PSone
- 2000
- With both *House Of The Dead* and *Resident Evil* being so popular, Capcom basically put the two games together in 2000. Despite having a truly awful method of control and nasty pixelated graphics, the game went onto spawn three sequels.

VAMPIRE NIGHT



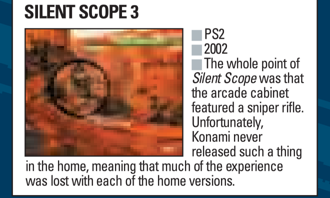
- Arcade/PS2
- 2001
- A collaboration between SEGA and Namco would result in a fine gaming experience, right? Well that wasn't the case, as *Vampire Night* lacked the pace, graphics or vibrant level structure that had made *House Of The Dead* so great.

TIME CRISIS: PROJECT TITAN



- PSone
- 2001
- Developed exclusively for the PSone, *Project Titan* played differently from the other *Time Crisis* games, and looked a little like *Die Hard Trilogy*. Interestingly, many players consider this to be the best game in the *Time Crisis* series.

SILENT SCOPE 3

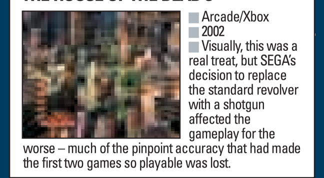


- PS2
- 2002
- The whole point of *Silent Scope* was that the arcade cabinet featured a sniper rifle. Unfortunately, Konami never released such a thing in the home, meaning that much of the experience was lost with each of the home versions.

DINO STALKER

- PS2
- 2003
- Following on from *Resident Evil: Gun Survivor*, *Dino Stalker* was basically the lightgun version of *Dino Crisis*. Visually this was a real mixed bag – the overall effect wasn't bad at all, but some of the textures were massive and blurry.

THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD 3



- Arcade/Xbox
- 2002
- Visually, this was a real treat, but SEGA's decision to replace the standard revolver with a shotgun affected the gameplay for the worse – much of the pinpoint accuracy that had made the first two games so playable was lost.

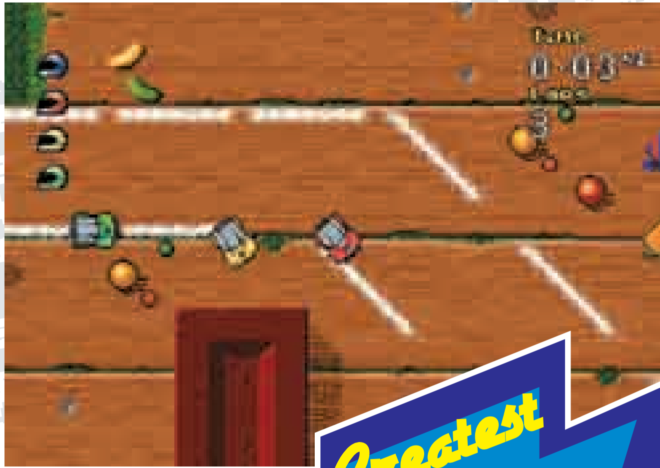
TIME CRISIS 3

- Arcade/PS2
- 2002
- Initially this was almost identical to the second game in the series, though it soon became apparent that the sets were more extreme. Unfortunately, the dreaded PS2 jaggies struck and a flickery display marred the game in the arcade.

VIRTUA COP 3

- Arcade
- 2003
- Clearly inspired by Namco's *Time Crisis* series (as well as *Max Payne*), *Virtua Cop 3* featured a foot pedal that produced a bullet-time-like effect. Set in the future, much of the vibrancy was lost and everything looked a little drab.





Greatest RETRO Game Ever

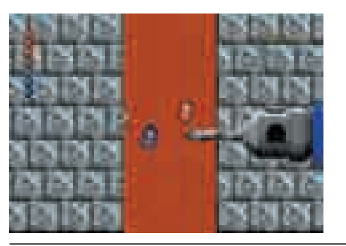
M·I·C·R·O M·A·C·H·I·N·E·S 2

T·U·R·B·O T·O·U·R·N·A·M·E·N·T

Title: **Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament**
Format: **Mega Drive, SNES**
Release: **1994**
Developer: **Codemasters**

The best racing game ever? Possibly. The best multiplayer game ever? Perhaps. The best use of a licence ever? Almost definitely. Taking the then-popular miniature car toys and dumping them onto a variety of household tracks may seem like something of a no-brainer but it was the flawless manner in which Codemasters pulled off *Micro Machines 2* that impressed us most. Simple control, varied courses (with the ability to build your own as well) and a decent range of different vehicles all combined to make for a unique experience that holds its own ten years after it was released – go back to it and you'll find as enjoyable as ever. But just what was it about the toy-based racer that made it so good?

The top-down view and scrolling tracks may not seem great when compared to today's polygon-pushing racers, but somehow Codemasters managed to take what could have been a very irritating system and twist it into near perfection. An excellent array of modes filled the cartridge, meaning that even once you'd mastered the Super League, Challenge and Head To Head modes, there was still the endless potential of Time Trial mode – with such short courses, you never had to worry about putting the hours in, leaving you free to concentrate on breaking the five-second barrier on Rim Runners. We lost count years ago of just how many times the game cartridge changed hands as the *Micro Machines* massive constantly bettered each other's lap times until they were nigh-on perfect. Happy days…



▲ Drills, pipes, bricks…most everyday objects became hazards in *Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament*.

The fun really began when you made full use of the game's ingenuity, though. The built-in multi-tap on the cart itself (the J-Cart, as it was known) meant that with four pads you were ready to experience the bottom line in four-player racing. In terms of sheer enjoyment and playability, few (if any) racers have encroached on the Codies' multiplayer territory to this day – even the in-house update, *Micro Machines V3*, couldn't topple its dimensionally inferior predecessors. That said, every instalment in the series has had its merits and we can only hope that any future updates revert to the tried and tested top-down viewpoint that we know and love.

Toys In The Attic

Breakfast tables, garden trails and tree houses all round…

Micro Machines, Mega Drive, 1993
Laying the foundations for the gems to come, this and its subsequent ports started the ball rolling in the series' trademark style.

Micro Machines 2: TT, Mega Drive, 1994
The high point of the series, *Turbo Tournament* built on the success of the first game and showcased excellent design and playability.

Micro Machines '96: TT, Mega Drive, 1995
'More of the same' springs to mind. There were signs of over-complexity that could have killed the game's charm if it weren't so well controlled.

Micro Machines Military, Mega Drive, 1996
Based on the popular Tank levels of previous games, the racing side of the game took a back seat to the excellent battle arenas.

Micro Machines V3, PSone, 1997
The extra dimension certainly didn't harm the good name of the *Micro Machines* series, and while *V3* was far from a classic it was a good solid racer.

Micro Maniacs, PSone, 2000
Ditching cars and opting for crazy on-foot racing, *Maniacs* was a surprisingly good title for something so brave and original, but it didn't quite capture the original's magic.

Micro Machines, Multi, 2002
The token next-gen update managed to ruin everything, losing all style and playability. Still, at least the GBA version was a little more true to its roots…

Famicom Giveaway

THE ANSWERS



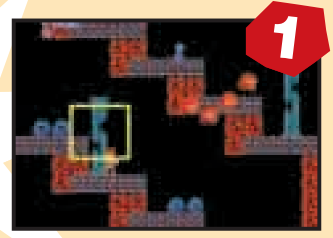
And there we were, thinking that we'd come up with possibly the toughest competition known to man…

If you're particularly eagle-eyed you might have noticed the fiendishly devious competition we ran in issue 11 in order to celebrate 20 years of Nintendo's Famicom (known as the NES in the Western world). Being the persuasive types that we are, we'd talked Nintendo into letting us have one of its 1,000 limited edition Famicom Game Boy Advance SPs to give away to one of you lucky people. Ooh, we were jealous.

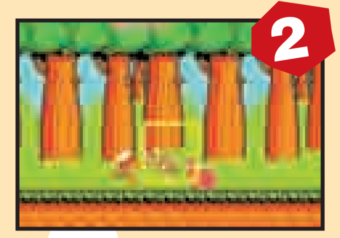
Of course, actually winning this damn fine prize took a bit more effort than just sending your name in, and that's where you all appear to have gone crazy.

In an attempt to put game names to the fourteen cut-out screenshots we printed, we've had hundreds of emails not only offering your answers, but also pouring scorn on us for setting such a difficult task. Still, that isn't to say you lot don't know your stuff – for every five people that messed it up royally, there was at least one who got all of them right, or at least came mighty close. So maybe we underestimated you.

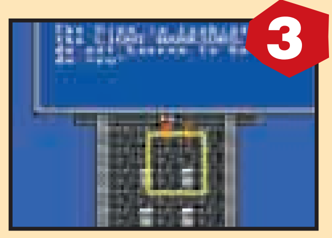
By now, the winner will be in possession of their shiny new Famicom SP (and under strict instructions not to put it on eBay – we're watching, just in case), but for the rest of you still anxious to be put out of your misery, here are all the answers, along with markers showing which bits we cropped out for the competition. You'll be kicking yourself when you see some of them…



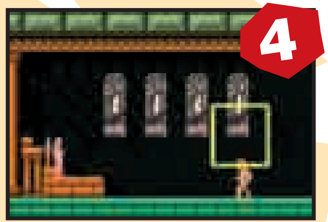
Kid Icarus (1986, Nintendo)



Adventure Island (1986, Hudson Soft)



Final Fantasy (1987, Square)



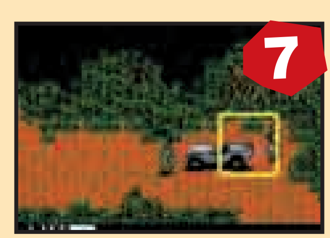
Faxanadu (1988, Hudson Soft)



A Boy And His Blob (1989)



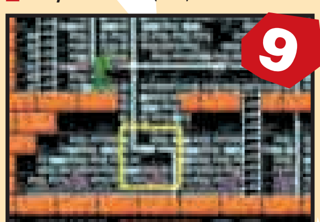
Ninja Gaiden (1989, Tecmo)



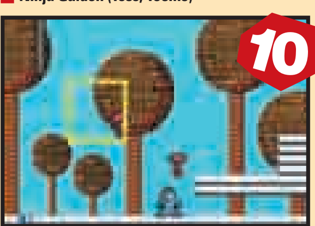
Metal Gear (1988, Konami)



Yoshi's Cookie (1992, Nintendo)



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (1989, Konami)



MegaMan (1987, Capcom)



Dragon Warrior (1986, Enix)



Kirby's Adventures (1993, HAL Laboratories)



Bionic Commando (1988, Capcom)



Castlevania (1987, Konami)



Sure, SEGA's Game Gear was technically impressive, but if you wanted to a gaming marathon you needed to look elsewhere...

GAME GEAR

SPECIFICATIONS

CPU: 8-bit Z80 processor
CPU SPEED: 3.58 MHz
MEMORY: 8K RAM, 16K Video RAM
RESOLUTION: 160x146
MAXIMUM NUMBER OF SPRITES: 64
COLOURS: 32 on-screen from a palette of 4096
SOUND: 4-channel stereo
STORAGE: Cartridge
INPUT/OUTPUT: Gear-to-Gear cable port, headphone jack





GO WHERE YOU WANNA

Of all the handheld consoles ever created, the Game Gear's D-pad was perhaps the best. As well as being responsive and accurate, it also featured raised plastic wedges between the four directions, making rolling motions more comfortable.

Back in 1991, with Nintendo's Game Boy already proving that a handheld system with interchangeable games could be highly successful, SEGA released its own portable console, the Game Gear. The Mega Drive was performing well at retail, and with the company's solid understanding of graphics technology, SEGA was fairly certain that it could manufacture a piece of hardware that was more advanced than Nintendo's.

The Game Boy's dated monochrome display severely limited the visual quality of its games, so surely a splash of colour from SEGA would be more than enough to attract a good percentage of gamers. Initially going on sale in America at $159.99 (£95), the system quickly built up a healthy following.

Far more stylish than the Game Boy, the system came in a sleek black finish and was quite clearly designed to look cool. In fact, the 'grown-up' appearance of the hardware played a big part in the marketing – SEGA claimed the Game Gear would 'Separate the men from the boys', obviously having a pop at Nintendo at the same time. However, despite the machine's great aesthetics and colour screen, SEGA had overlooked one vitally important element – the battery life.

Powered by no less than six AA batteries, the Game Gear disappointed some owners by offering around three hours' worth of entertainment before running out of juice, making the machine incredibly expensive to run.

A power supply unit was available for a small sum, of course, but being permanently plugged into a socket completely undermined the point of it being a portable system in the first place. Despite its shortcomings, though, the Game Gear actually boasted an extremely solid catalogue of games – more than 240 in fact.

Among the line-up were classics such as *Sonic The Hedgehog* and *Shinobi*, as well as Game Gear exclusives like *Ax Battler*, which took the *Golden Axe* theme and turned it into an RPG.

There was also a converter known as the Master Gear which enabled Game Gear owners to play Master System games on their portable consoles.



GG TV

Aside from being a (semi) portable games console, the Game Gear also doubled as a handheld television, provided you were lucky enough to own a TV Tuner. These pricey little add-ons fitted straight into the cartridge slot and featured an extendable antenna and analogue tuner capable of receiving all terrestrial television channels. Although slightly bulky, the GG TV tuner is still extremely sought-after, and regularly sells for as much as £50.



▲ It looks like a clock radio (without the clock) but the TV Tuner is still a popular piece of kit.

TWO BUTTONS

Two buttons were enough for the many Master System games that were ported.

COLOUR SCREEN

The backlit colour screen was attractive, but meant that battery life was short.

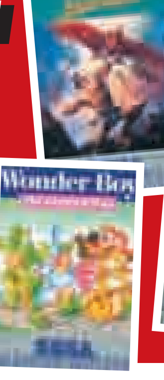
"WHY I LOVE MY GAME GEAR"

Aside from battery life, SEGA's 'portable' beauty was a machine way ahead of its time. A slew of excellent exclusives joined forces with the best the Master System could offer to ensure that proud Game Gear owners would have just as much to shout about as those carrying the green-screened enemy.

Luke Albigés

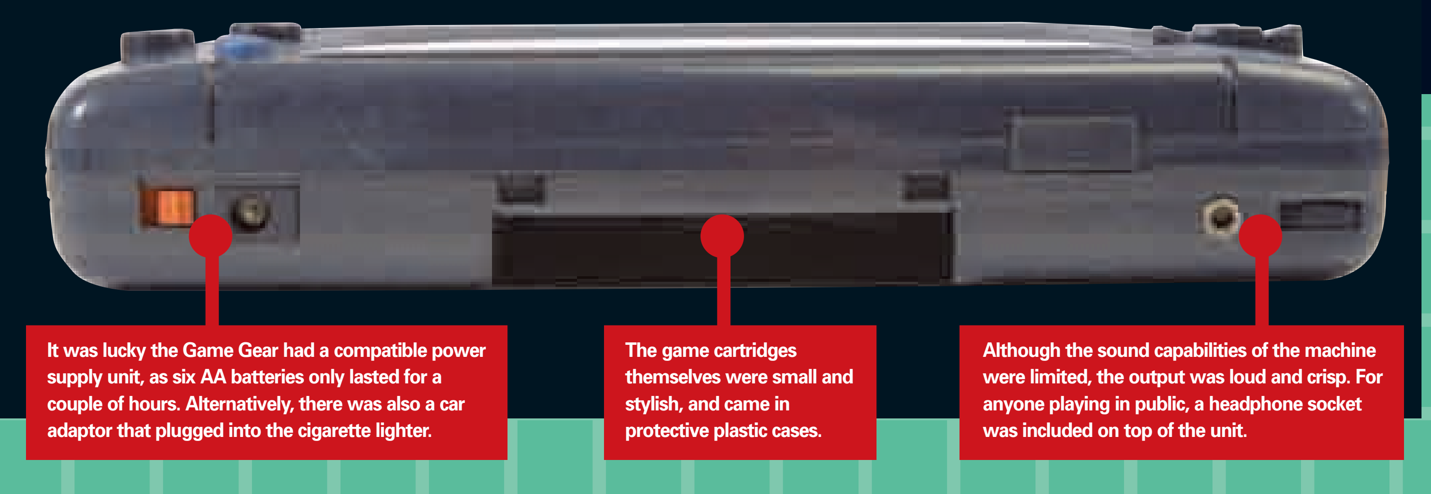
GAMING GOODNESS

Over 240 games were released for the Game Gear, with many more becoming available if you bought the Master Gear Converter. Games tended to retail for around £30, and many of SEGA's classic titles were among the line-up. The system even had its very own *Mario Kart* clones in the form of the *Sonic Drift* series.





AROUND THE BACK



It was lucky the Game Gear had a compatible power supply unit, as six AA batteries only lasted for a couple of hours. Alternatively, there was also a car adaptor that plugged into the cigarette lighter.

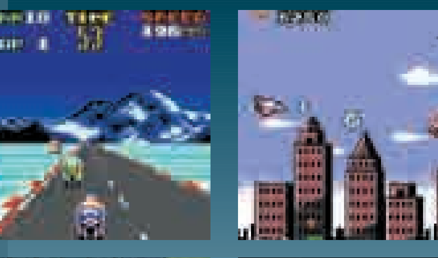
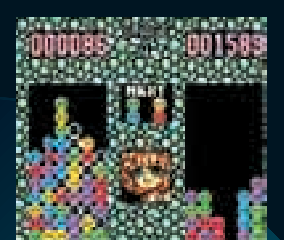
The game cartridges themselves were small and stylish, and came in protective plastic cases.

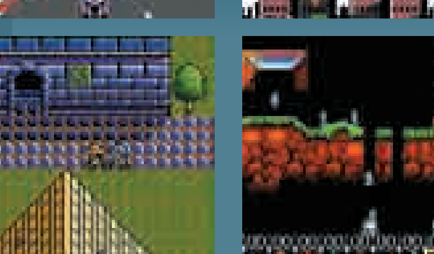
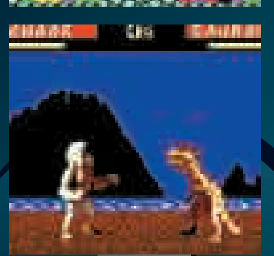
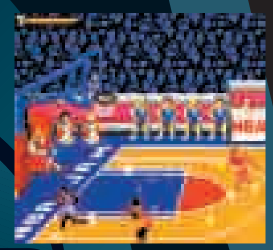
Although the sound capabilities of the machine were limited, the output was loud and crisp. For anyone playing in public, a headphone socket was included on top of the unit.

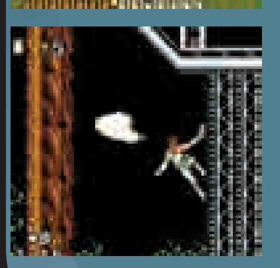
Classic Machine

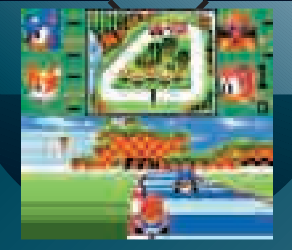
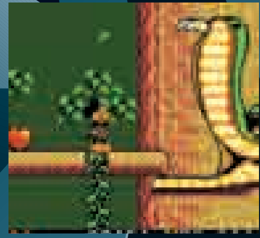
GAME GEAR

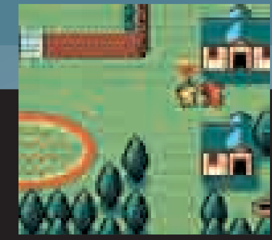
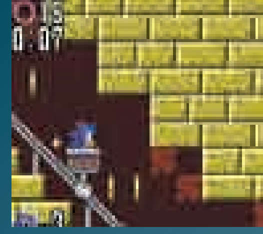
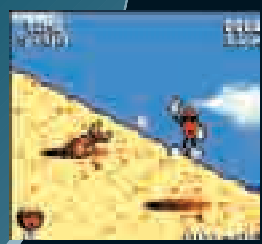
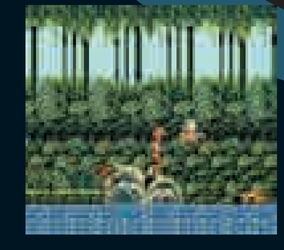
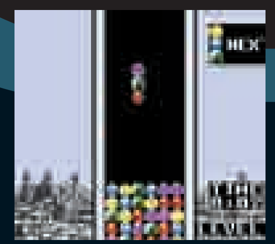
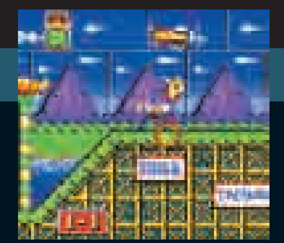
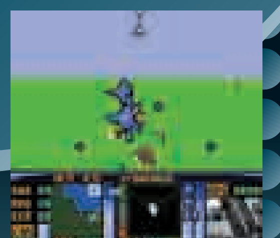
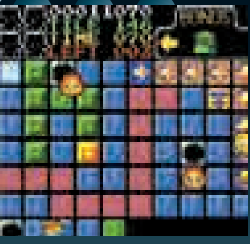
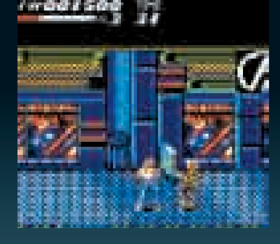


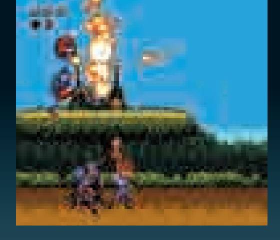
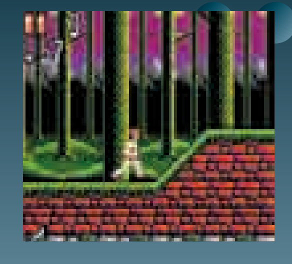



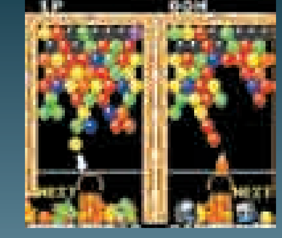
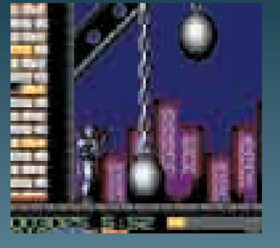
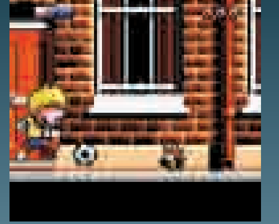







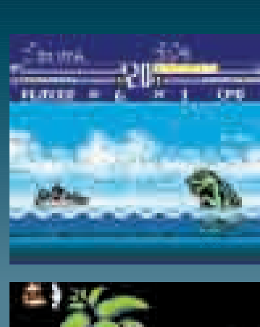
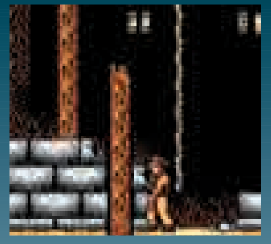
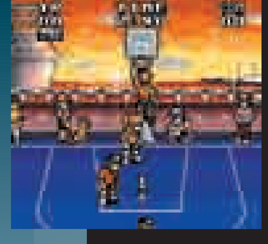
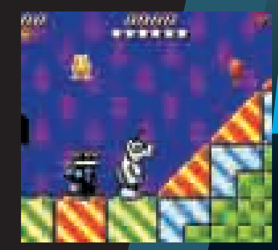
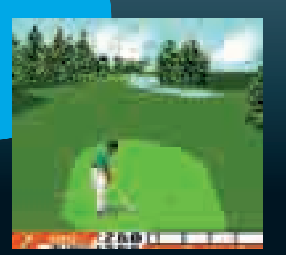



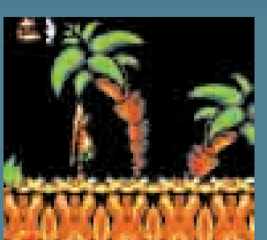
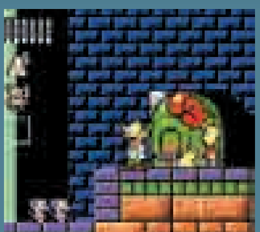











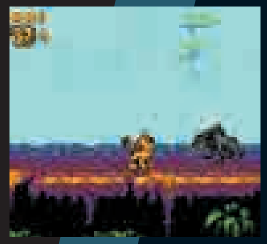



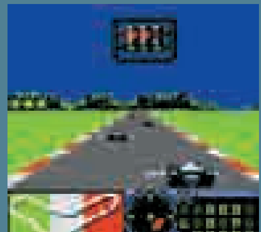
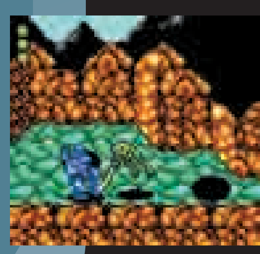
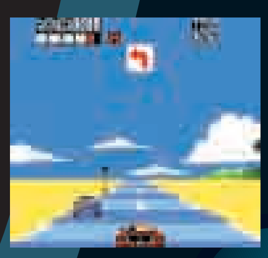
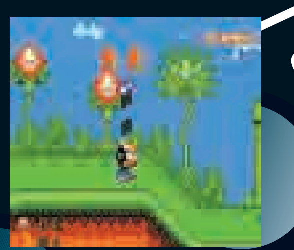
SEGA

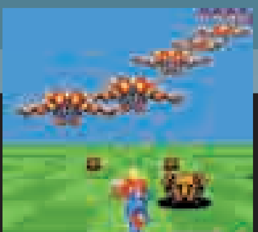
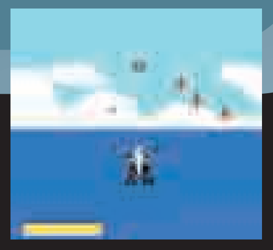
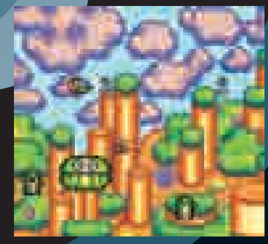
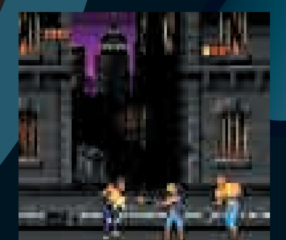
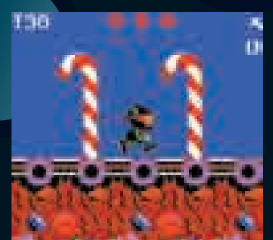






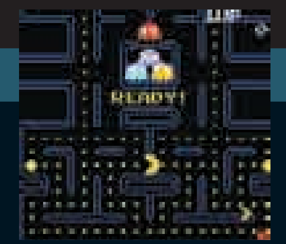



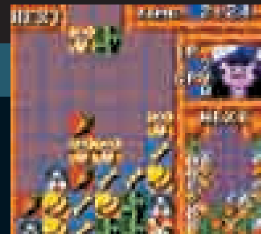
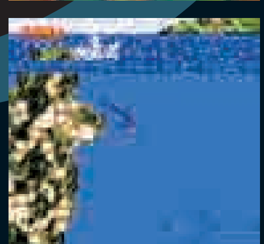
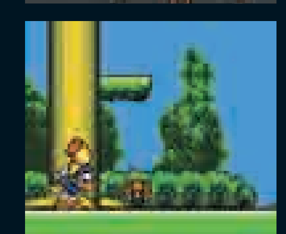




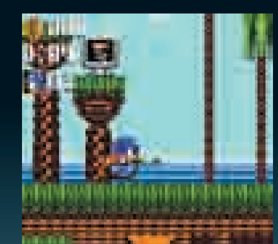
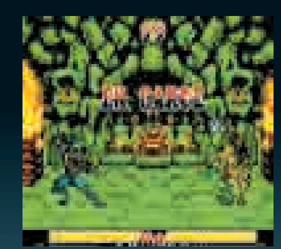
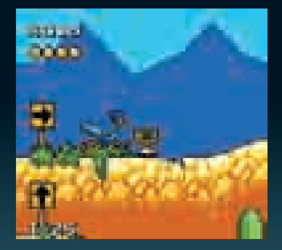





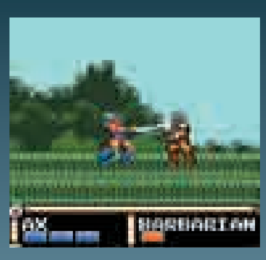






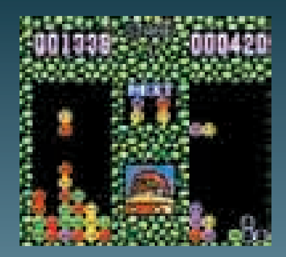
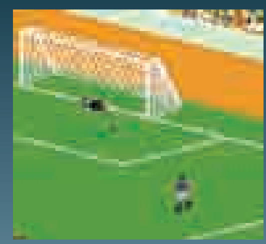


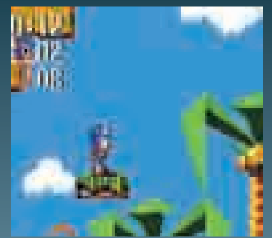










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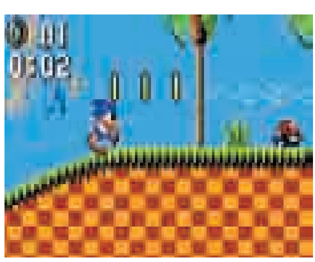
The Game Gear may have been a little too big for your pocket, but many gamers put up with its size to play some of these well-known titles…

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Publisher: **SEGA**
Year: **1991**

Although it was perfectly playable, *Sonic The Hedgehog* for the Game Gear lacked some of the refinement of its Mega Drive older brother. Backgrounds were flatter, Sonic himself was a little less detailed, and everything was cut down for the handheld system. Almost identical to the Master System version, it was only when the two were side by side that you discovered that all the sprites had been enlarged for the pocket translation to make things easier to see on the small screen.

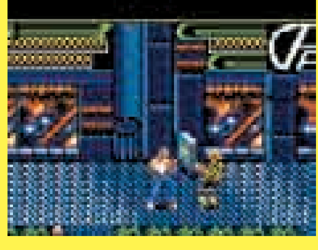


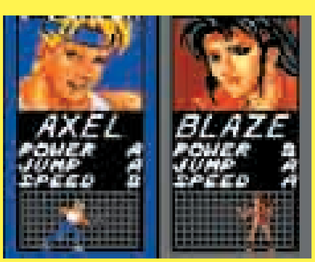


STREETS OF RAGE

Publisher: **SEGA**
Year: **1992**

Based on the Mega Drive game, *Streets Of Rage* on the Game Gear was something of a butchered affair. Adam Hunter (the third playable character in the original version) had been removed from the game, leaving just Axel Stone and Blaze Fielding to take on the criminal scum that patrolled the streets of Capital City. Despite the obvious omissions, though, the pocket game managed to capture the spirit of the original perfectly and even featured Yuzo Koshiro's music score.

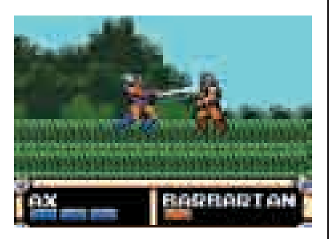




AX BATTLER: A LEGEND OF GOLDEN AXE

Publisher: **SEGA**
Year: **1991**

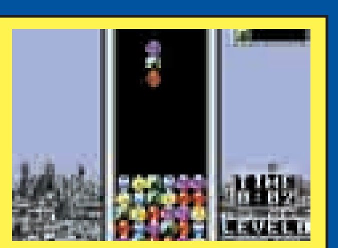
Although *Ax Battler* was based on the arcade game *Golden Axe*, its gameplay was completely different. Rather than simply walking from left to right while hacking at enemies, this little gem revolved around successfully reaching new towns where new moves could be added to your repertoire. Like *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link*, *Ax Battler* had elements of scrolling beat-'em-up and platform gaming, though most people referred to it as an RPG.



COLUMNS

Publisher: **SEGA**
Year: **1991**

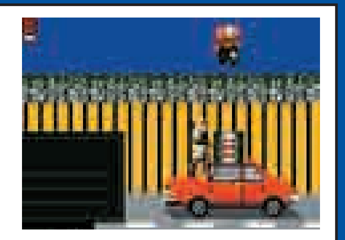
Nintendo had *Tetris*, so SEGA needed a pocket puzzle game of its own. And what better way to show off its spangly new handheld system than by releasing something similar to the Nintendo game, but with a splash of colour and a little more flair. Of course, *Columns*' colour-matching gameplay would never surpass *Tetris*' sheer playability, though it certainly gave it a good run for its money. Unfortunately, SEGA's puzzle effort also featured some highly irritating music and was, as it is now, constantly in the shadow of Nintendo's block dropper.



THE GG SHINOBI

Publisher: **SEGA**
Year: **1991**

With all those classic arcade games ripe for translation, it wasn't too surprising that *Shinobi* was released for the Game Gear. Interestingly, many gamers actually considered it to be one of the better conversions; although visually it wasn't a patch on the original, the gameplay translated exceptionally well to the small screen. Furthermore, to shake up the gameplay a little, the five different locations (which had been designed specifically for the handheld) could be approached in different orders to gain secret power-ups.



CRYSTAL WARRIORS

Publisher: **SEGA**
Year: **1991**

Back in 1991, handheld RPGs were few and far between. Due to a lack of memory on the tiny cartridges, and because battery back-up was still relatively new, the genre simply didn't translate that well to portable systems. Even so, *Crystal Warriors* was a surprisingly solid attempt, which featured turn-based battles and traditional Wind, Water, Earth and Fire elements. Similar to *Final Fantasy Tactics*, the action was based around a chessboard-like grid, though here it was viewed from a top-down perspective.





Tempest (Arcade) Atari, 1981 – Original arcade flyer



GAMES THAT NEVER QUITE MADE IT…

JAMBO! SAFARI

GAMES THAT NEVER QUITE MADE IT…

Some games come out in Japan but never get translated, while others never even get released. And some, like *Jambo! Safari*, appear in arcades but never on consoles…

Title: **Jambo! Safari**
Developer: **Hitmaker**
Format: **Naomi Arcade Board**
Release Date: **1999**

With so many formats in the arcade industry, it wasn't surprising that SEGA saved time and money by developing an arcade board based on its Dreamcast technology. This happened in 1998, at which time the company's most advanced board was the Model 3. Although the Dreamcast was still a little way behind it in terms of raw power, the new console was more efficient with textures and transparencies, and was much less expensive. And so the Naomi arcade board was born – a piece of kit with so many similarities to the Dreamcast that game projects could easily be ported from one format to the other with very little effort or additional cost.

For SEGA fans, this was a great way of previewing upcoming Dreamcast titles, as practically every Naomi game that came out in the arcade would eventually get converted to the home system in more or less arcade-perfect form. In fact, some of the Dreamcast's best games started out in the arcade. *Crazy Taxi* and *Virtua Tennis*, for example, both made a significant impact in coin-op form before going on to become top sellers on the home system.

However, not every Naomi game got converted to the Dreamcast simply because of the financial difficulties SEGA was having at the time. *Jambo! Safari*, as one such title, was never going to shift consoles to the mass market, and probably wouldn't have appealed to that many hardcore gamers either. With the company struggling to successfully market bigger and better games, it was hardly going to waste precious dollars on something that was never going to sell. And so *Jambo! Safari* remained an arcade-only title, which is a huge shame.



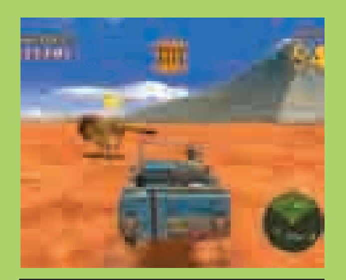
▲ *Jambo! Safari* wasn't the most realistic game ever, but it was certainly a lot of fun.

Like *Crazy Taxi*, the main objective of the game was so straightforward that anyone could play it. Taking control of a vehicle speeding across the African plains, the idea was simply to chase after various wild animals and secure their capture within the given time limit. To make this more difficult, the capture was broken down into three stages – the chase, the lasso, and the net. What this meant was that your initial task was to locate an animal and bring your vehicle as close behind it as possible. Next, you'd have to carefully target the creature and fire a lasso around its neck, before gradually pulling it in next to the vehicle. Finally, once it was just a few metres away, a net could be thrown to complete the capture and hopefully win you some points.

As short and sweet as the game was, the beauty was in the replay value. You see, due to the score-based nature of the gameplay, regular players would repeatedly try to beat their high score, just as they did with *Crazy Taxi*. This would undoubtedly make a great handheld game, and with the PSP launching next year, such a thing might not be so far-fetched after all.



▲ Four Rangers were available, each with their own vehicle, though they were all essentially the same.



▲ Everything the light touches is our home… Sadly, the Rangers weren't too bothered about Simba's welfare.

STRETCHY BEASTS

Anyone who played *Jambo! Safari* may have noticed the unusual skin effects on the animals. As the beasts ran, their undersides stretched in a semi-realistic skin-like manner before pinging back into shape.

Unfortunately, this 'pinging' resulted in strange vibrations that looked quite unnatural and really rather disturbing. To make matters worse, only certain joints were 'skinned' – the others still had ugly polygon joins.







DIZZY DEVIL IN TINY TOON ADVENTURES: BUSTER BUSTS LOOSE

Konami has always been great at creating bosses, but would you believe that this is actually one of their more normal ones…?

Tiny Toon Adventures for the SNES wasn't one of the longest games around in 1993, though like lots of other Konami titles it was positively overflowing with quirky ideas and gameplay innovations. As well as numerous mini-games, including squash and the *Pac Man*-inspired Babs' Find Your Friends, the game also featured a skipping section and references to *Back To The Future* and *Star Wars*.

With so many great elements, it's not really surprising that this also featured a very amusing mini-boss, who cropped up just a short way into the game. Dizzy Devil, a distant descendant of Taz, was tearing up the kitchen and making a mess as a petrified Hampton was left trembling in terror outside. Naturally, only Buster had the intelligence and agility to take on Dizzy and get things back to normal.

Inside the kitchen, five conveyor belts carried food through doorways at either side of the screen and Dizzy Devil would make his way along them, moving from belt to belt by going through the doors. By making sure you were always on the belt beneath him it was possible to jump and knock plates of food into his enormous mouth.

Unfortunately, after every two platefuls, he'd spin about the place in a frenzy, knocking sections out of the conveyor belts and injuring any bunnies who happened to be standing in the way. After nine courses, though, the ravenous beast would come over all sleepy, clearing the way for Hampton and allowing you to move on to the next level. Odd, yes, but not by Konami standards…



▲ Despite Buster's casual stance, he's already formulated a plan to do away with that irritating Taz thingy.

STAR GAMES!

It's an astonishingly cool film, and the game isn't too bad either, so we don't care that the Doom II arcade machine in Grosse Pointe Blank doesn't even exist…

If you're making a film and you want to add a bit of light relief to a shoot-out in a convenience store, what better way to offset the destruction of Twinkies and Hershey Bars than by throwing a little *Doom* into the mix? When hitman Martin Blank walks into the Ultimart store that stands on the site of his childhood home, the only other person in there is the dopey clerk who's utterly engrossed in a *Doom II* session.

Walkman on and hat jammed down, the assistant is oblivious to the outside world. Even when assassin Felix La PuBelle turns up and engages Martin in a blistering firefight that destroys half the store, the clerk is too busy hammering away at the buttons to notice anything wrong. So while Martin is busy trying to off the rival hitman, this guy is gunning down legions of demons in the lower reaches of hell.

Of course, the more astute among you will probably understand why the shop assistant was so captivated with his game: as *Doom II* was never released as an arcade title, he's got himself a pretty collectable cab – we'd certainly put up with the occasional flying bullet to get our hands on a game that rare.

Especially keen-eyed viewers will also spot a continuity error – the level the clerk appears to be playing suddenly switches from Level 30 to Level 1, then Level 8 and back to Level 30 within a few seconds. But we only noticed this after it was pointed out by a fanboy website, and it's hardly the sort of thing to spoil a film of the calibre of *Grosse Pointe Blank*, so please don't let this put you off this fine movie if you've yet to see it.

Sadly, no-one's going to get their hands on the *Doom II* cab now. Before fleeing the shop, La PuBelle left some explosives in the in-store microwave. Martin spots this and escapes, dragging the confused clerk with him. They survive; the game, alas, does not.



▼ Yes, a *Doom II* arcade cabinet. Another reason why *Grosse Pointe Blank* rules.



Step-by-Step

This Month: EXOLON

While many gamers (mostly C64 owners) scoffed at the Amstrad's graphical capabilities, there were many developers who knew how to get the best results from the machine. Step forward Raffaele Cecco; for Amstrad fans, the man was a god, and *Exolon* was a perfect example of his work – bright, bold and bloody hard. This shoot-'em-up replaced the usual spaceship with a tooled-up hero, and with over 120 fiendishly difficult screens to navigate, *Exolon* was gaming bliss. Here's a reminder of the first stage – don't forget your rockets…

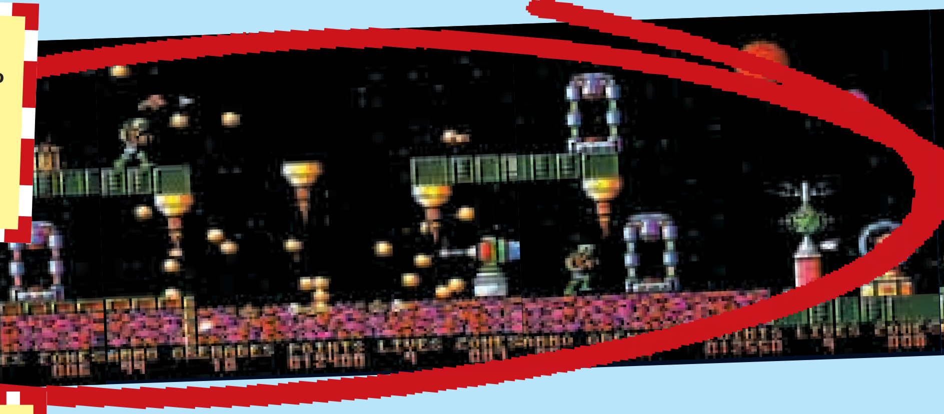
START

Screens 0-2

Nice and easy to begin with: blow up the gun emplacement with a rocket, then proceed to knock out every missile on screen one. Quickly nip through the Teleporter before the gun can shoot you, then move on to screen three…

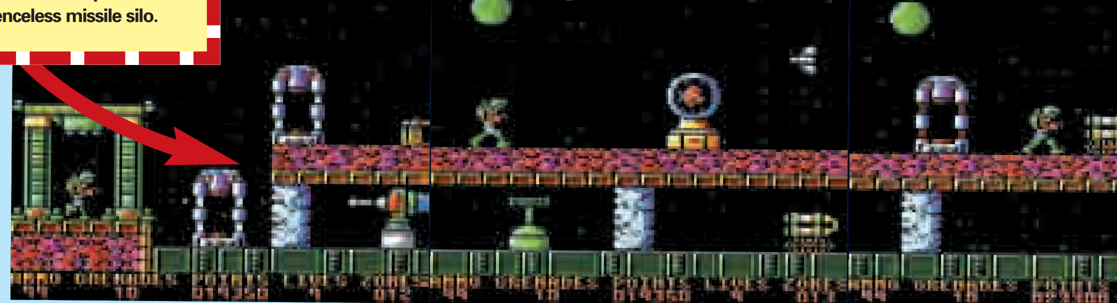
Screens 6-8

These next three screens are a nightmare. First you need to alternate between walking and crouching to take out the missile silo, then reach it to receive plenty of deserved points. You can then use the Teleporter to receive the ammo refills, or simply proceed through to the next set of Teleporters. Destroy more red spores and you're home free.



Screens 12-14

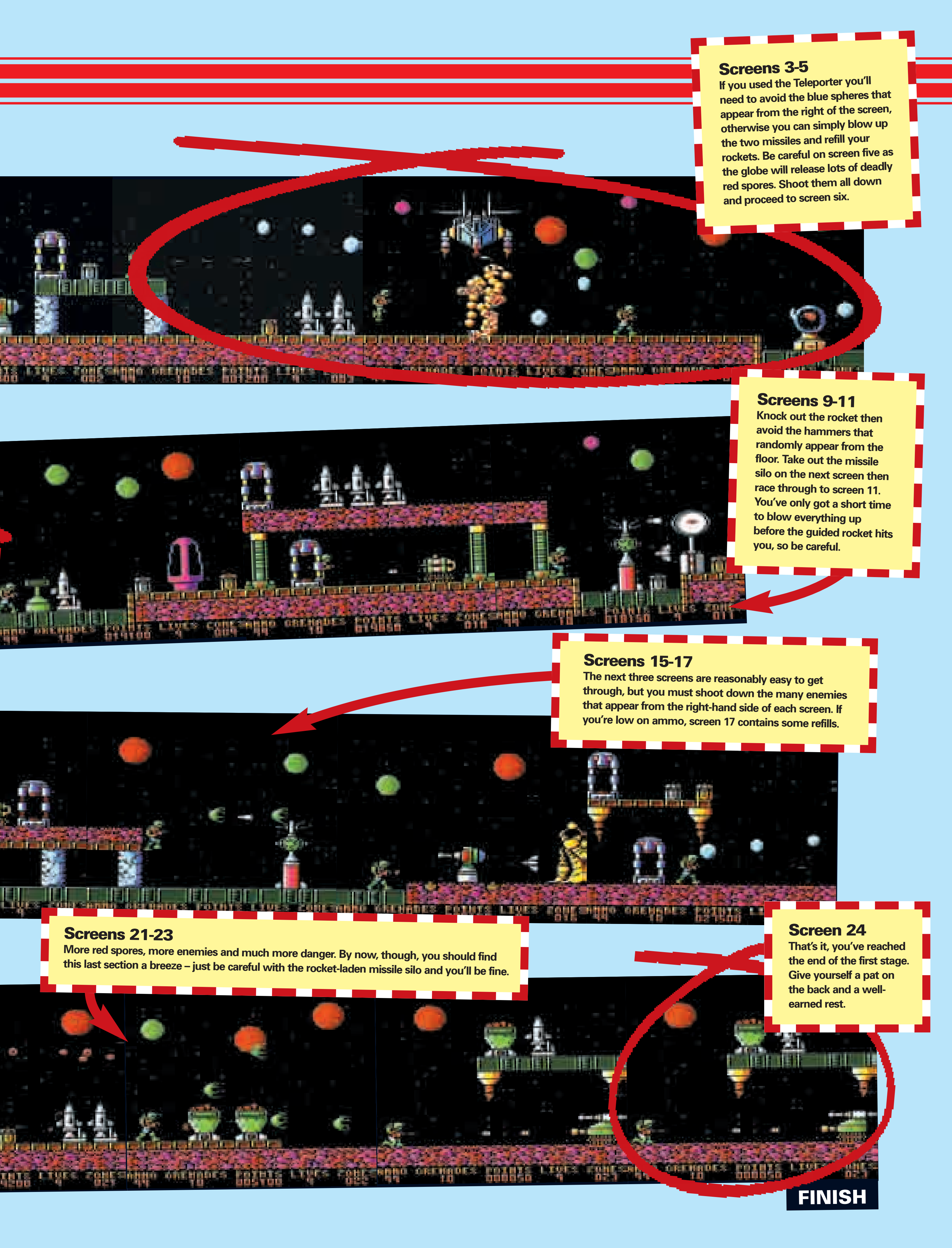
Zip through the Teleporter, destroy the red spores on screen 13 and you can then nip through yet another Teleporter and get some sneaky points from the defenceless missile silo.



Screens 18-20

There's another guided rocket here; the trick is to wait until the last moment and then teleport before it hits you. Quickly teleport back, destroy the red spores and proceed to screen 21. More spores await you, but you're nearly there…





Screens 3-5
If you used the Teleporter you'll need to avoid the blue spheres that appear from the right of the screen, otherwise you can simply blow up the two missiles and refill your rockets. Be careful on screen five as the globe will release lots of deadly red spores. Shoot them all down and proceed to screen six.

Screens 9-11
Knock out the rocket then avoid the hammers that randomly appear from the floor. Take out the missile silo on the next screen then race through to screen 11. You've only got a short time to blow everything up before the guided rocket hits you, so be careful.

Screens 15-17
The next three screens are reasonably easy to get through, but you must shoot down the many enemies that appear from the right-hand side of each screen. If you're low on ammo, screen 17 contains some refills.

Screens 21-23
More red spores, more enemies and much more danger. By now, though, you should find this last section a breeze – just be careful with the rocket-laden missile silo and you'll be fine.

Screen 24
That's it, you've reached the end of the first stage. Give yourself a pat on the back and a well-earned rest.

FINISH

Look Back in Anger

We're all for games that pay homage to past classics, but the Oliver Twins and Codemasters took things a little too far…

We may be huge fans of Dizzy, but even we're not afraid to admit he's appeared in a couple of stinkers. While the loveable egg's adventuring games are pretty much unbeatable (pun intended), his dabbling in other genres has been questionable. Games like *Dizzy Down The Rapids* and *Panic Dizzy* were classic examples of Codemasters taking the good Dizzy name and simply applying it to the first bit of tat that came along (complete with the inevitable 'this game's fantastic' quote on the back of the cassette cover).

While titles like *Bubble Dizzy* were reasonably good fun, few could say that was the case with the awful *Pac-Man* rip off that was *Fast Food*. You can't really blame the Oliver Twins (oh, go on then) for leaching off the yellow muncher's glory, but did they really have to make such a hash of what should have been a pretty simple game? Instead of creating a straightforward clone and simply sticking everyone's favourite ovoid in it, the Oliver Twins had much grander designs for Dizzy's new adventure…

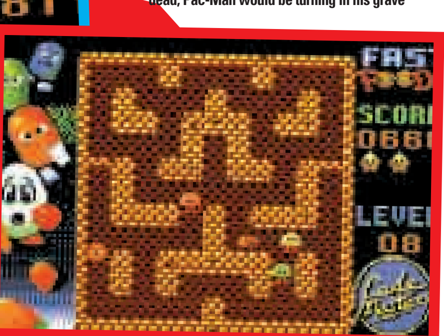
Dispensing with the static pills and power-ups of *Pac-Man*, the twins (in what was one of the game's few inspired touches) allowed most of the food to run away from you. Unfortunately, a selection of pointless power-ups, some cheap-looking intermissions and a laughable difficulty level meant that only the most hardcore Dizzy fans garnered any enjoyment from this title.

Fast Food's power-ups were a classic example of the extremely poor implementation found throughout the game; take the speed-up and slow-downs for example. Rather than affecting you or your numerous opponents, the entire game would be influenced, which made the whole sorry exercise rather pointless. And don't even get us started on the various coloured bottles you could collect… It's been 14 long years and we still can't work out why the game contained two power-ups that effectively enabled you to do exactly the same thing. We also have to give special mention to the freeze icon that would foolishly block off your exits if you picked it up at the wrong time.

Difficulty was another factor the twins didn't consider. Poor AI meant it was extremely easy to get through the game's 30 levels; and with a free life after every third stage you'd see the dull ending within a few hours. Okay, so it was only £1.99 but that was once a lot of money. Dizzy may have a special place in our hearts but a recent play of *Fast Food* made us want to hunt down the little fella and turn him into an omelette. Thank god we've still got *Treasure Island Dizzy*…



▲ Back in the days of 8-bit systems, bland scenes like the one above were passed off as cartoons.

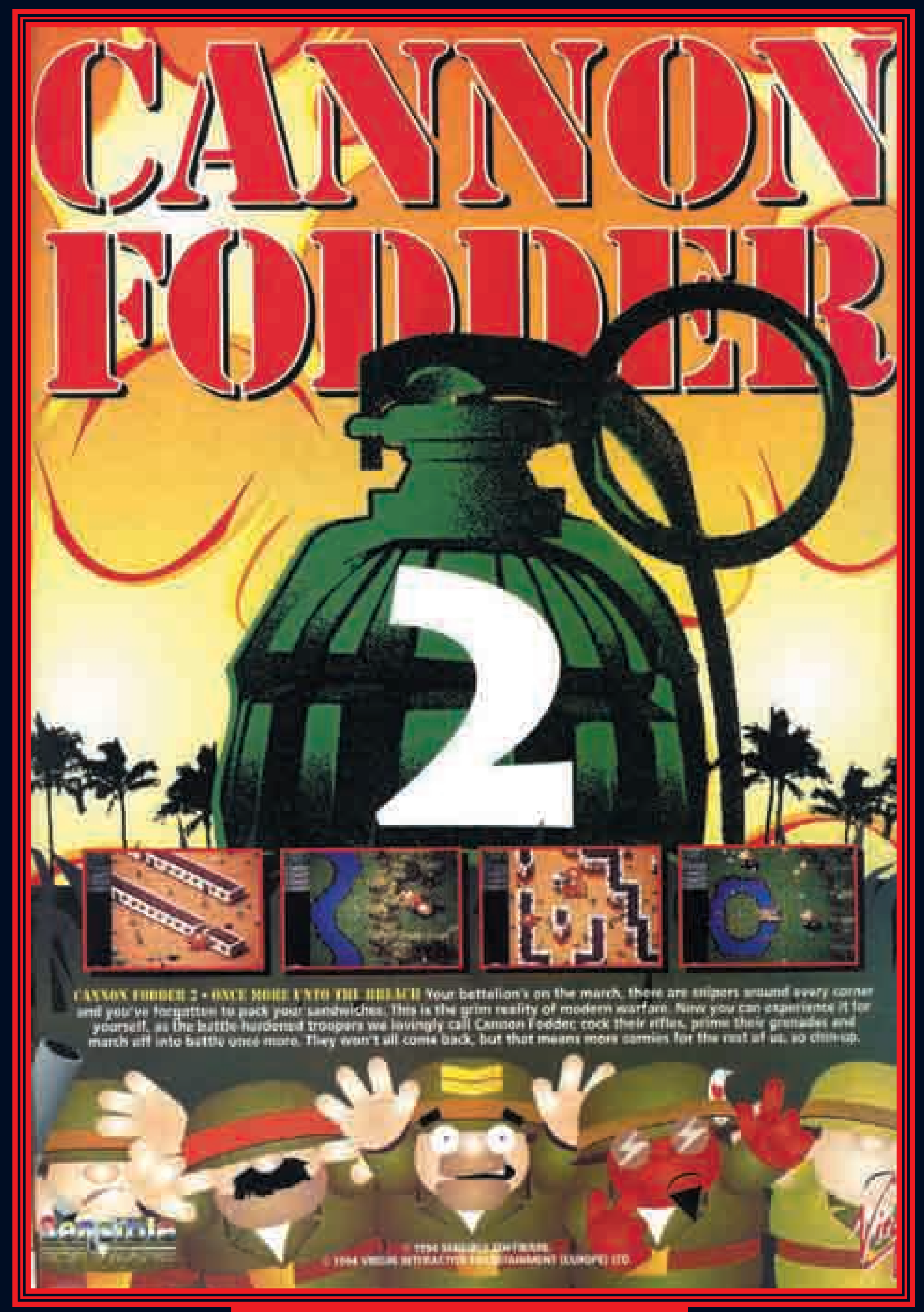


▼ Here it is, *Fast Food* in all its glory. If he was dead, Pac-Man would be turning in his grave

LAST MONTH'S PC ENGINE SCREENSHOTS

It never really hit the big time in Europe, but look at all these top-quality games…

FIRST ROW	SECOND ROW	THIRD ROW	FOURTH ROW	FIFTH ROW	SIXTH ROW	SEVENTH ROW	EIGHTH ROW
Moto Roader	Kiki Kai Kai Ninja	Tiger Shark	Cratermaze	Final Blaster	Batman	Blazing Lazers	Night Creatures
Image Fight	Dead Moon	Burning Angels	Hit The Ice	Toy Shop Boys	Air Zonk	Cadash	Die Hard
China Warrior	Alien Crush	Pac-Land	Altered Beast	Champion Wrestler	Darius Alpha	Parasol Stars	Darkwing Duck
Columns	Aero Blasters	Devil's Crush	Power Eleven	Gunboat	Parodius	Metal Stoker	Neutopia
Bonk's Adventure	Adventure Island	Race Drivin'	Street Fighter II: Champion Edition	Time Cruise	Racing Spirits	Soldier Blade	Military Madness
City Hunter	Power Drift	Ninja Spirit	The New Zealand Story	Space Harrier	The Legendary Axe	Populous	Raiden
Naxat Open	F1 Circus	Falcon	KickBall	Fantasy Zone	Power Gate	Splatterhouse	Ninja Gaiden
Cyber Dodge	Bomberman	Operation Wolf	Victory Run	Sonic Spike	Power League	Shinobi	Jackie Chan's Action Kung Fu
Heavy Unit	Klax	Psycho Chaser	Gradius	Cyber Core	Knight Rider Special	R-Type	Shockman
World Court Tennis	Out Run	Bravoman	Vigilante	Magical Chase	World Jockey	Wonderboy In Monsterland	Chase HQ



Cannon Fodder 2 (Amiga) Sensible Software, 1994 – UK advertisement



COVER ME BADD

We unearth some of the truly shocking box art from forgotten retro games

Nowadays, a game's box art is seen as an instrumental part of helping a prospective buyer bond with a title. Publishers spend huge amounts of cash to ensure that what lies on the outside accurately reflects what is contained within. When they get it right, the result is often something that a gamer is more than happy to have proudly displayed in their collection. Of course, this isn't always the case and you only have to look at the UK cover of *Quantum Redshift*, or the horrendous US *Ico* art to realise just how bad artwork can upset a game's karma.

While we wouldn't say that cover artwork has necessarily improved over the years (although it is deemed a lot more important now) you do have to wonder how some cover concepts ever got past the design stage. Over the next few months, we'll be paying homage to the very best of the very worst cover art. Be prepared, though, as some of this is really quite disturbing…

Vixen

◆ Released: 1988
◆ A classic example of the 'sex sells' era. The concept is still around today, but isn't so blatantly obvious. Shame on you, Martech Games.



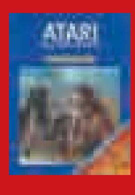


Double Dragon

◆ Released: 1989
◆ Hmm, naff cover, naff game. Sure, the menacing main pose looks okay, but what the hell is going on at the bottom?

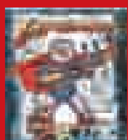
Mega Man 2

◆ Released: 1988
◆ Oh, Capcom, what were you playing at? Most of the company's covers were appalling and this is a perfect example of how not to capture a game.



Defender

◆ Release: 1981
◆ It may have been a fantastic game (and it came with a free comic), but it still has comedy art. Run away, run away…



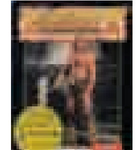
Impossamole

◆ Released: 1990
◆ We don't know what's worse – the laughable cover, or the fact that a company got away with calling itself GBH.



Kick Off

◆ Released: 1983
◆ Simply superb, although judging by the players in the background the main footballer is missing his steel bar.

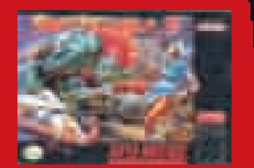


Barbarian II

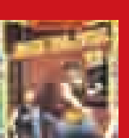
◆ Released: 1988
◆ Wow, a cover that just about fails on every level. Sorry, Wolf, but you're no Conan the Barbarian.

Street Fighter II

◆ Released: 1992
◆ Why is Blanka smiling, why does Chun-Li look like a man, and why is this cover so crap? The mind boggles.

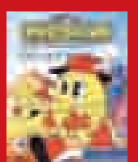


Joe Blade II



◆ Released: 1989
◆ It's good to see that some of the Village People were able to find a way to make a living after the hits dried up.

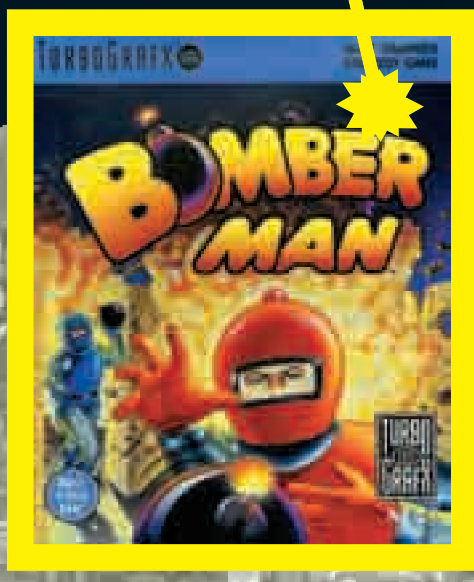
Pac-Land



◆ Released: 1989
◆ My god, Namco, you can't defile the mighty Pac-Man. You'll be making a naff cartoon next – oops, too late…

Bomberman

◆ Released: 1991
◆ Easily one of the most shocking covers ever designed. Did the designer ever actually play the game? Truly, truly awful.





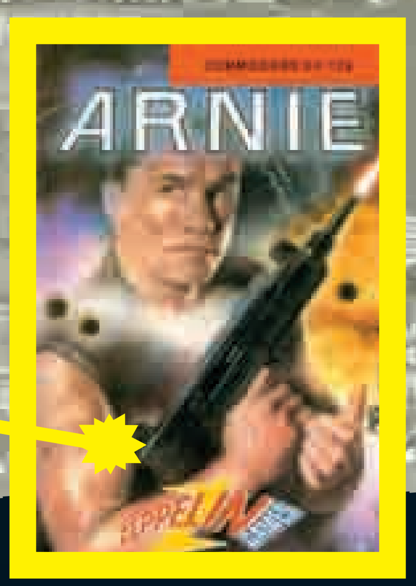
Guardian Heroes

◆ Released: 1996
◆ It was bad enough having such awful cases for US Saturn games, but that artwork is simply unforgivable.

Babe And Friends

◆ Released: 1999
◆ Why do film licences always seem to have such atrocious artwork? That'll do pig…



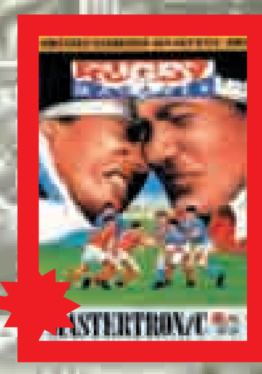


Arnie

◆ Released: 1992
◆ One of our current favourites; it's not too hard to see what market *Arnie* was geared towards.

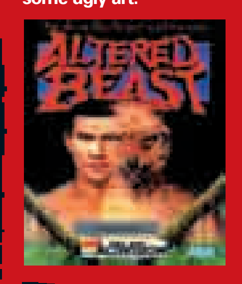
Rugby Manager

◆ Released: 1986
◆ We're not really sure what's going on here. Is the guy on the left trying to kiss his opponent? Whatever the case, he seems to be enjoying it…

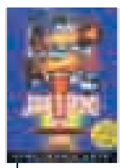


Altered Beast

◆ Released: 1988
◆ It may accurately represent what the game is about, but, damn, that's some ugly art.

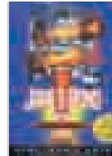


Ghouls 'N' Ghosts



◆ Released: 19892
◆ Come on, Capcom, it couldn't have been that hard to find someone who could draw properly.

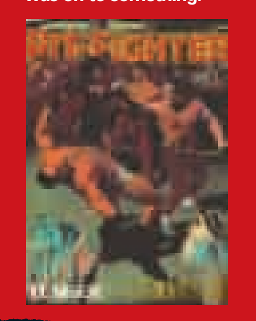
James Pond II: Codename Robocod



◆ Released: 1993
◆ Rubbish character, rubbish game, rubbish box.

Pit Fighter

◆ Released: 1991
◆ Now this is nasty. Saying that, though, the atrocious cover does reflect the content found within, so maybe Domark was on to something.





Operation Thunderbolt

◆ Released: 1989
◆ Here's a classic example of using the arcade machine to persuade people that the home experience will be every bit as good.

Retro Contact

Share your views about old-school gaming

First Contact
Every retro gamer loves to talk about old-school gaming. Or argue about retro games. Or have mud-wrestling matches about retro games. Okay, maybe not the last one. But if you if you do have a point to make, then why not do it here?

SEEING RED

Dear games™,
I've been reading your great magazine since issue 1 and was wondering if you're ever going to be covering the Virtual Boy in depth. I know this was a Nintendo machine that didn't do particularly well, but I bought one recently and couldn't believe just how much fun there was to be had.

It's strange how such a small unit can project such a vast playing area – the sense of depth is far greater than I ever imagined it would be. It's just too bad that all the graphics are red. Perhaps if Nintendo could have somehow developed a colour display then the system would have sold much better.
Tim Stafford via email

■ **You're quite right, the Virtual Boy was indeed an innovative piece of kit, even though it failed to make a profit. And in reference to your first question – yes, we will be covering it in depth sometime over the coming months. On the subject of the Virtual Boy, we can't help wondering when a company will try something like it again in the future. VR helmets are no longer around and it's clear if you look at PC games that console titles are severely limited by TV resolution. Perhaps at some point there'll be actual 3D games that are projected into the room in hologram form, or maybe they'll be displayed in ways that haven't been invented yet. Let's just hope that next time somebody does it in colour. Until then, we'll go back to dreaming of hovercars and meals in pill form…**

Castle Of Illusion

Dear games™,
In your last issue you featured a piece about *Castlevania Resurrection* – you know, the one that was cancelled on the Dreamcast. Well, aside from the dodgy-looking characters, I was amazed to see just how similar the game looked to the preview shots from the new *Castlevania* game on the PS2. In fact, if anything the textures were a little crisper and the overall look somewhat sharper. I also seem to remember that it was being programmed by Konami Of America, and I was wondering if any of the people who worked on it went to Japan to help develop the new game?
Andrew Stevens via email



■ **You're not wrong about how good *Castlevania Resurrection* was looking, but that's no guarantee it would have played well too. You're also correct in thinking that the game was being programmed by Konami USA, but it's extremely unlikely that any of the team responsible went to work on the latest game in Japan. From what we can tell, the development team was constantly changing for the entire time that *Resurrection* was in the works, and many of those involved left the company around the time the project was cancelled.**

MALCOLM IN THE MIDDLE

Dear games™,
I only started playing games about five years ago, and it's only been recently that I've got into the retro side of things (in fact, it was your magazine that inspired me). I've already picked up a handful of older systems at car boot sales and have sampled many others through emulation on my PC.

The thing I've noticed is that, on the whole, it's the games that were released during the 16-bit era that are the most enjoyable. Don't get me wrong, there are some absolute classics on the C64 and Spectrum, but I've yet to find

Football Crazy

Dear games™,
I was reading your football family tree in the retro section of issue 12 and to my utter disgust, you hadn't included *SEGA Worldwide Soccer '98* on the Saturn. I happen to think this was one of the finest games ever to come out on the console, so why wasn't it included? You even had complete rubbish like *FIFA* on there for god's sake!
Greg James via email



■ As we've pointed out before, our family trees aren't supposed to include every single game within the chosen category – even if we could get our hands on a definitive list, we wouldn't be able to fit them all on the page. No, the family tree is merely supposed to highlight key games in the progression of either a series or genre through the years, and, putting it bluntly, *WLS '98* simply wasn't a key game. Both *FIFA* and *ISS* were already more advanced by that time, while classics like *Sensible Soccer* were infinitely more playable. We're not disputing the quality of *WLS* – it was a good little game – but it was hardly at the cutting edge of football games at the time of its release.

anything that plays as well as *Super Mario World* or *Sonic The Hedgehog*.

Also, I've found that the 3D follow-ups to some of my favourite 2D games (most notably *Sonic The Hedgehog*) have failed to live up to their predecessors. Do you think the time will come when 3D games play as well as 2D ones did? I'd really like to see a new *Mario* game with 96 levels, or a new *Sonic* that omits all the new characters and gameplay novelties in favour of solid, unadulterated platform gaming like the original Mega Drive game.
Malcolm Cookson, Portsmouth

■ We get lots of letters from veteran gamers who prefer 2D games, but such an opinion from someone who only got into gaming five years ago is unusual. Of course, *Super Mario World* and *Sonic The Hedgehog* are two examples of 2D gaming at its greatest, but it's worth remembering that there were plenty of half-hearted efforts around at the time too. Just look at *Bubsy The Bobcat In Claws Encounters Of The Furred Kind* for proof of that.

By contrast, there are some great 3D adventure games out there, though *Sonic Adventure* and *Mario Sunshine* aren't the best examples. If you want a really good 3D platform game that takes things back to basics, you could try *Ico* or *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*, both of which offer a fairly pure gaming experience. We agree though, a *Mario* game with 96 levels would be nice. *Mario 128* perhaps?

I DROVE ALL NIGHT

Dear games™,
I just thought I'd tell you about the adventure I had trying to find SEGA's new *Out Run 2* machine in the arcade. I've been reading about the game in your magazine and can't wait to play it – I've actually got an original *Out Run* arcade machine in my garage, but it's a bit temperamental these days. Anyway, one of my friends was insisting he'd played the new game in an arcade in the centre of London. I was a bit dubious about this because I knew it was out in Japan but hadn't heard anything about a UK release date. But my mate was positive he'd played it, so I decided to drive down to London in my ancient Fiesta. The journey usually takes about an hour and a half, but…

I was about halfway there when the car died and I was left stranded at the side of the dual carriageway. Luckily, the AA rescued me for the tidy sum of £50. I finally made it into London roughly two hours later than I'd anticipated, only to discover that *Out Run 2* was nowhere to be seen. Yes, my friend had either been very much mistaken, or I was simply the victim of a crap practical joke. Either way, I wasn't very happy, as I'd managed to waste a whole day and over £50 on tracking down a non-existent machine.

So when is *Out Run 2* coming out here, just so I can get my car fixed in time for another trip to London…
Tim Stockley via email

■ Well, Tim, we're only sorry we don't offer a small cash prize for 'a funny thing happened' type stories in a *Bella* style. Instead, we can only suggest you buy a new car, find yourself some new friends, and/or wait for a console translation of *Out Run 2* (if SEGA ever pulls its finger out and converts it). As for the arcade release date in the UK, it will probably be announced at the ATEI Arcade show in London in March. Watch this space…

If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to say, why not write to us at:
Games™ Retro, Highbury - Paragon, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS
Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk



CLASSIC CONSOLE

BUYERS GUIDE QUICK REFERENCE

BUYERS GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£35 (the original model costs less)
Atari Jaguar	£25

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£200-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£100-150
PC Engine GT	£150-200
Super Grafx	£200-250

NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£35-40
Mega CD	£40-60
SEGA 32X	£30
SEGA Nomad	£75-100
SEGA Saturn	£30
Dreamcast	£25-30

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system) (prices for multi-slots are higher)	£70
Neo Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo Geo CD	£125-175
Neo Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£40-50

CONSOLE OF THE MONTH



- NAME: GAME GEAR
- PRICE: £35-40
- THREE OF THE BEST:
  Sonic The Hedgehog (est. price £5)
  The Lucky Dime Caper (est. price £6)
  Castle Of Illusion (est. price £5)
- If you can afford the batteries you're likely to get a lot of enjoyment out of SEGA's stylish, colour-screen handheld console.

HOW TO USE GTM

SELLING

To sell items on GTM, simply list the following details in an email to: gtm@paragon.co.uk

- Your name
- Your age (you must be over 18)
- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The item(s) you wish to sell (no more than five per month please)
- The condition of the item(s) you wish to sell
- How much you want for the item(s)

Each item will then be allocated a lot number and listed on GTM, along with your region in the UK.

BUYING

To buy an item from GTM, all you have to do is list the following details in an email to: gtm@paragon.co.uk

- Your name
- Your age (you must be over 18)
- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The reference number for the item you're interested in

WANTED

If you're simply trying to get hold of a long-desired item, contact us in the same way as above stating what you want and any preferences on its condition or price.

After contacting us, your email address will be passed onto the relevant seller or buyer, who will contact you directly to complete the deal, arrange payment and make plans for postage, collection or delivery. Please note that this runs on a first come, first served basis

GTM RULES AND SMALL PRINT

This is a service for private sellers, not dealers. GTM is for sales of retro games only – no post-Dreamcast consoles or games allowed. There's little point in advertising Mega Drive *FIFA* games as everybody already has at least two copies. Highbury - Paragon cannot take any responsibility for items lost or broken in the post

BUY & SELL your retro games with games™

G.T.M.

GAMES TRADING MARKET

Searching for an elusive copy of Radiant Silvergun? Want to sell that pile of Spectrum games taking up space around the house? Then check out GTM, the most authentic retro sales column in the world.



FOR SALE

Lot 42 – **Game Boy Color** plus *Metal Gear Solid*, *Tennis* and printer. All unboxed. £25 (or near offer). Fife.

Lot 43 – **Neo-Geo Pocket Color** (clear vinyl) including *Sonic* and *Pac-Man*. Boxed as new. £80. Barnes.

Lot 44 – **Nintendo 64** (turquoise clear vinyl) plus two controllers and *Mario 64*. Boxed as new. £60. Barnes.

Lot 45 – ***Metal Gear: Snake's Revenge*** for NES. Boxed with slipcase, but no instructions available. Very good condition. £10 plus p+p (o.n.o.). West Mids.

Lot 46 – **Atari VCS 2600** (woody) with two joysticks, four paddles, plus games including *Space Invaders* and *Missile Command*. Working with PSU. Open to offers. Coventry.

Lot 47 – **Sinclair Spectrum 48k** with tons of games, including *Skool Daze* and *Gauntlet*. Two joysticks. Working with PSU. Open to offers. Coventry.

Lot 48 – **V-Lab/Virtual Lab for Virtual Boy**. New condition. £300 plus p+p. Surrey.

Lot 49 – **American GCE Vectrex** with 14 games, including *Star Trek Blitz*, *Spike* and *Berserk* (ten of which have instruction booklets). Also, Artmaster with instruction book and lightgun. System



and games in excellent condition, screens and instructions in good condition. $500 o.n.o. Massachusetts, USA.

Lot 50 – **Boxed SEGA Saturn** with 12 games, all boxed with instructions. All leads, two pads and one demo disc included, though the console box is missing its internal packaging. £60. Lancs.

Lot 51 – ***Final Fantasy VIII*** (PAL) for PSone. Boxed but no instructions. £3.50 plus p+p. North Yorks.

Lot 52 – ***Hellfire*** (NTSC) for SEGA Mega Drive. Boxed with instructions. £3 plus p+p. North Yorks.

Lot 53 – ***Knight Lore*** for Spectrum. Boxed with instructions. £1 plus p+p. North Yorks.

Lot 54 – ***Star Wars Arcade*** for Atari VCS. Boxed with instructions. £8 plus p+p. North Yorks.

Lot 55 – ***Uridium*** for C64. Boxed with instructions. £1 plus p+p. North Yorks.

WANTED

WANTED 21 – ***Star Ocean*: *The Second Story*** for PSone. Must be in good condition, preferably with box and instructions. Forfar.

WANTED 22 – **PC engine NEC FX console** or Super Grafx console. Must be in good condition. Will pay £80. Barnes.

WANTED 23 – ***King Of Fighters 2001*** (Jap) for SEGA Dreamcast. Will pay up to £20. Barnes.

WANTED 24 – ***Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*** (Jap) for SEGA Dreamcast. Will pay up to £20. Barnes.

WANTED 25 – ***Ikaruga*** (Jap) for SEGA Dreamcast. Will pay up to £20. Barnes.

WANTED 26 – ***The Secret Of Mana*** for Super Nintendo. Any condition accepted, providing it works. Manchester.

WANTED 27 – **SNES or Mega Drive**. Will pay up to £20. Bristol.

WANTED 28 – **Any interesting JAMMA arcade boards**, arcade cabinets etc. Also looking for a Neo-Geo MVS motherboard.

WANTED 29 – ***Samba De Amigo*** plus maracas for SEGA Dreamcast. Will pay well. Warwickshire.

WANTED 30 – ***Burning Rangers*** for SEGA Saturn (UK or US versions only). Will pay £20-£30. Middlesex.

WANTED 31– ***Panzer Dragoon Saga*** for SEGA Saturn (UK or US versions only). Will pay £60-£85. Middlesex.

WANTED 32 – **Two MB Vectrex control pads plus any other related accessories**. Must be in good working order. West Mids.

GAMES™ RETRO CLASSIFIEDS

Send to: **games™, Retro Classifieds, Highbury - Paragon, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS or email gtm@paragon.co.uk**

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Tick classified heading

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Write your advertisement here, one word per box, and only include your name, address, phone number and/or email address below if you want them printed



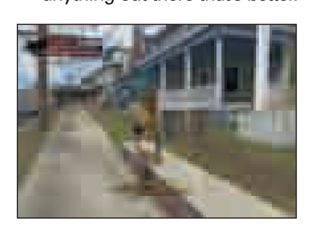
International Superstar Soccer (SNES) Konami, 1995 – UK advertisement


eMag

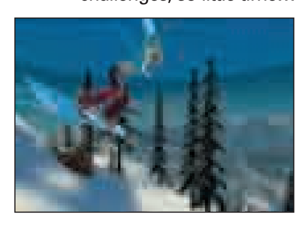
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

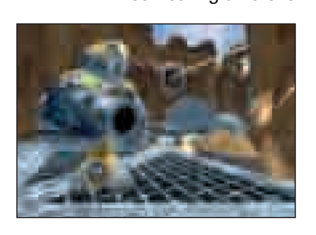
VIEWPOINT
TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND
The series might be five games old now, but there's no sign of the *Tony Hawk* express slowing down any time soon. Opinion is divided on the non-skating sections, but there really isn't anything out there that's better.



VIEWPOINT
SSX 3
Looking almost as nice as its Xbox brother, but having the added benefit of online play and a controller with more buttons, EA's snowboarding extravaganza is still keeping us occupied for many an evening. So many challenges, so little time…



VIEWPOINT
METAL ARMS: GLITCH IN THE SYSTEM
One that came out of nowhere and surprised a lot of people. It's not going to set the world alight, but *Metal Arms* is still a solid and enjoyable shoot-'em-up. Great if you're looking for something different.



PLAYSTATION2

MANUFACTURER Sony **UK LAUNCH DATE** 24 November 2000 **MEDIA** 4.75-inch DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £139.99



The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. With support across the board from third-party developers, a built-in DVD player and backward compatibility with older PSone games, it's the most popular videogame console available today.

TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
1	Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
2	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Enough content to keep you going for ages
3	Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House	If you only own one football game, it should be this
4	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the *Tony Hawk* series
5	Dark Chronicle	Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
6	Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House	Ubisoft shows how to make a proper retro update
7	Rez	SEGA	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
8	Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
9	Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
10	SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk* of the snowboarding world
11	Suikoden III IMPORT	Konami	In-House	Konami's RPG series is still as good as it ever was
12	Metal Slug 3 IMPORT	Playmore	In-House	Old-school shooting has never been so much fun
13	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive	Top-notch squad-based action with an arcade twist
14	NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The daddy of basketball games – no contest
15	Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	In-House	Realistic racing for the purist in all of us
16	Project Zero	Wanadoo	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
17	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion	Arcade racing at its purest – fun with a capital F
18	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
19	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical	More multiplayer fun than most other FPS games
20	Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House	The original is still the best by a long shot

TOP OF THE POPS

Ico
By now you should have realised that we're not going to stop telling you to go buy *Ico*. It's a crime if you don't.



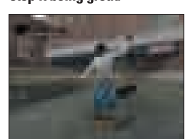
GTA: Vice City
Rockstar's free-roaming franchise just keeps on rolling. No doubt the twin pack will sell like mad…



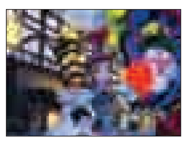
Pro Evolution Soccer 3
Considering Konami's series exists, you have to wonder why other people keep making footy games.

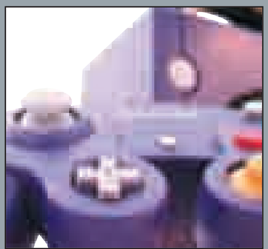


Tony Hawk's Underground
Neversoft's new take on the franchise might be a bit 'different', but that doesn't stop it being great.



Dark Chronicle
As RPG games go, this is a bit of a monster. You'll be lucky if you can do it all in a mere 60 hours…






XBOX

MANUFACTURER Microsoft **UK LAUNCH DATE** 13 March 2002 **MEDIA** 4.75-inch DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £129.99



Despite a slow start, the Xbox is swiftly becoming one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to the casual gamer than most PCs.

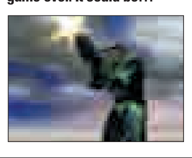
TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
1	Halo	Microsoft	Bungie	The game that sold a million Xbox consoles
2	Panzer Dragoon Orta	SEGA	Smilebit	Classic shoot-'em-up action, the SEGA way
3	Jet Set Radio Future	SEGA	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
4	Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	In-House	Who needs Solid Snake when you've got Sam Fisher?
5	Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
6	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical	More multiplayer fun than most other FPS games
7	Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations	Redefining how we play games online
8	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the *Tony Hawk* series
9	Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
10	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion Studios	Arcade racing at its purest – fun with a capital F
11	Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
12	Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
13	SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk* of the snowboarding world
14	Moto GP	THQ	Climax	Bargain-priced motorbike racing action
15	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a title
16	Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	Z-Axis	Surprisingly enjoyable, considering the competition
17	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive	Top-notch squad-based action with an arcade twist
18	Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	In-House	Realistic racing for the purist in all of us
19	Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	Shaba Games	More than just *Tony Hawk* on water
20	Tiger Woods 2004	Electronic Arts	In-House	Young Mr Woods shows us all how it should be done

BEST OF THE BEST

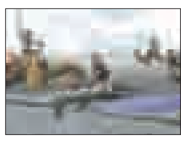
Halo

Like it or not, there's an awful lot of people out there who think *Halo* is the best game ever. It could be…



Panzer Dragoon Orta

SEGA's update of its classic franchise is what could be described as 'taking it back to the roots'.



Jet Set Radio Future

It might have a lot to answer for as far as cel-shading goes, but we still love a bit of graffiti.



Splinter Cell

Ubisoft really rewrote the book on stealth games when it came to Sam Fisher's daring adventures.



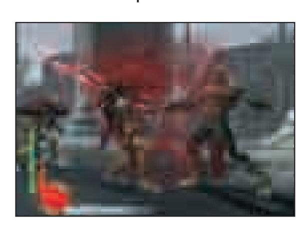
Star Wars: KOTOR

Believe the hype – as long as you can take all the stats, this really is the best *Star Wars* game in ages.



VIEWPOINT
LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE

After the last two slightly disappointing *LOK* titles, we were delighted to discover that *Defiance* gives you everything you'd want – bloodshed, great storytelling and then even more bloodshed. Inspired stuff.



VIEWPOINT
RAINBOW SIX 3

The thrill of sneaking through abandoned buildings with your unseen team-mates while talking quietly over your headset is one that has yet to be matched. Of course, it gets even better if one member of your team goes a bit gung-ho on your ass.



VIEWPOINT
PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

The appearance of Microsoft's sell-out racing title here won't come as a shock to many of you, particularly if you've been playing on Xbox Live and spotted us prowling the streets, looking for some racing action…



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

VIEWPOINT

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

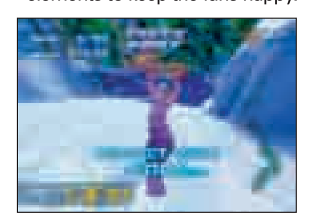
Officially, it's a 'grower' – one of those games that starts out with disappointment, but gets better the more you play it. We overcame our initial disdain to become massive fans, and we hope you'll do the same.



VIEWPOINT

1080° AVALANCHE

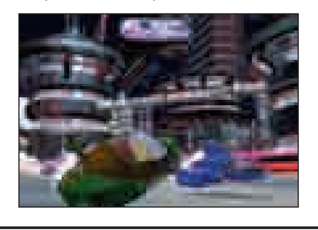
While it might not be the *SSX* beater than everyone was hoping for, Nintendo's long-awaited snowboarder is just as good, but for different reasons. It's a solid, more realistic attempt at the genre, with enough arcade elements to keep the fans happy.



VIEWPOINT

F-ZERO GX

Sadly, we won't be seeing the new arcade releases (*Galactic Cup* and *Climax*) any time soon but when the home version is as good as it is, we can forgive SEGA just this once. If you haven't got this one by now, you're already too far behind…



GAMECUBE

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **UK LAUNCH DATE** 3 May 2002 **MEDIA** 3-inch Optical Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £79.99



Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever and missing out isn't really an option.

TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
1	Metroid Prime	Nintendo	In-House	A genre-redefining title in every sense
2	Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	One of the many reasons to own a GameCube
3	F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	SEGA does it again with a brilliant retro remake
4	Winning Eleven 6 IMPORT	Konami	In-House	The closest you'll get to *Pro Evolution…*
5	Super Monkey Ball 2	SEGA	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
6	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical	More multiplayer fun than most other FPS games
7	Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	Another great moment in gaming from Nintendo
8	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the *Tony Hawk* series
9	Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
10	Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House	Not as ground-breaking as we hoped, but still great
11	Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
12	Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
13	Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour IMPORT	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
14	Resident Evil	Capcom	In-House	Still as scary as it was when it first came out
15	Resident Evil Zero	Capcom	In-House	An interesting twist on the *Resident Evil* franchise
16	Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	In-House	Looks great, plays even better
17	Skies Of Arcadia Legends	SEGA	Overworks	Absorbing RPG action with added 'arrrr' factor
18	Mario Party 5	Nintendo	In-House	Mini-game goodness, whether alone or with friends
19	Star Wars: Rogue Leader	Activision	Factor 5	Forget the follow-up – the original still has the edge
20	Animal Crossing IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year

CREAM OF THE CROP

Metroid Prime

The only game so far to score a perfect ten in the magazine – shouldn't that tell you something?



Zelda: The Wind Waker

Forget what people said about Link's new cel-shaded look being bad – they were wrong. Really wrong.



F-Zero GX

Faster than a speeding bullet? Oh yes. In fact, *F-Zero* is faster than a speeding bullet that's already late.



Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution

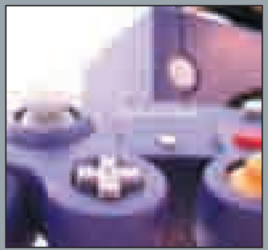
***Pro Evo*'s never coming out on the Cube, so you'll have to make do with this…**



Super Monkey Ball 2

Any game with monkeys in it is great – that's the law. But then we'd still love this even if we didn't have to.






GBA

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **UK LAUNCH DATE** 22 June 2001
MEDIA Flash Cartridge **CURRENT PRICE** £89.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available now.

TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher		Developer
1	Advance Wars 2	Nintendo		In-House
2	Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo		AlphaDream
3	Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo		In-House
4	Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo		Square-Enix
5	Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo		In-House
6	Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo		Camelot
7	Metroid Fusion	Nintendo		In-House
8	Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami		In-House
9	Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo		In-House
10	Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe	Wanadoo		Crawfish
11	Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubisoft		Crawfish
12	Yu-Gi-Oh: Stairway To The Destined Duel	Konami		In-House
13	Super Mario Advance 4: SMB 3	Nintendo		In-House
14	Pinball Challenge Deluxe	Ubisoft		Binary 9
15	Pokémon Pinball Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo		In-House
16	Legend Of Stafi	Nintendo	IMPORT	In-House
17	Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami		In-House
18	Mario Kart: Super Circuit	Nintendo		In-House
19	CT Special Forces	LSP		In-House
20	Wario Ware Inc: Mega Microgame$	Nintendo		In-House

KINGS OF THE HILL

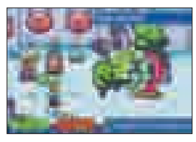
Advance Wars 2

You wouldn't think that strategy games would be so much fun, but this one's so addictive it's scary.



Mario & Luigi

A genuinely fresh and playable Mario game that's not a remake of an old SNES title. Absolutely brilliant.



Zelda: Link To The Past

The SNES port is fantastic on its own, but combine that with *Four Swords* and you've got an unmissable title.



PC

MANUFACTURER N/A **UK LAUNCH DATE** N/A
MEDIA 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics..

TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	The Sims	EA	Maxis
2	Deus Ex	Eidos	Ion Storm
3	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
4	Championship Manager 03/04	Eidos	Sports Interactive
5	Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve Software
6	Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
7	Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House
8	Medieval: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
9	Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
10	Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
11	System Shock	EA	Looking Glass Games
12	Call Of Duty	Activision	Infinity Ward
13	Sam And Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
14	Commandos 2: Men Of Courage	Eidos	Pyro
15	Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
16	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
17	Day of Defeat	Activision	Valve Software
18	Tron 2.0	Buena Vista	Monolith
19	Battlefield 1942	EA	In-House
20	Unreal Tournament 2003	Atari	Epic Games

LORDS OF THE MANOR

The Sims

Milked for all it's worth and yet still as great as it was when it first appeared. You've got to love *The Sims*.



Deus Ex

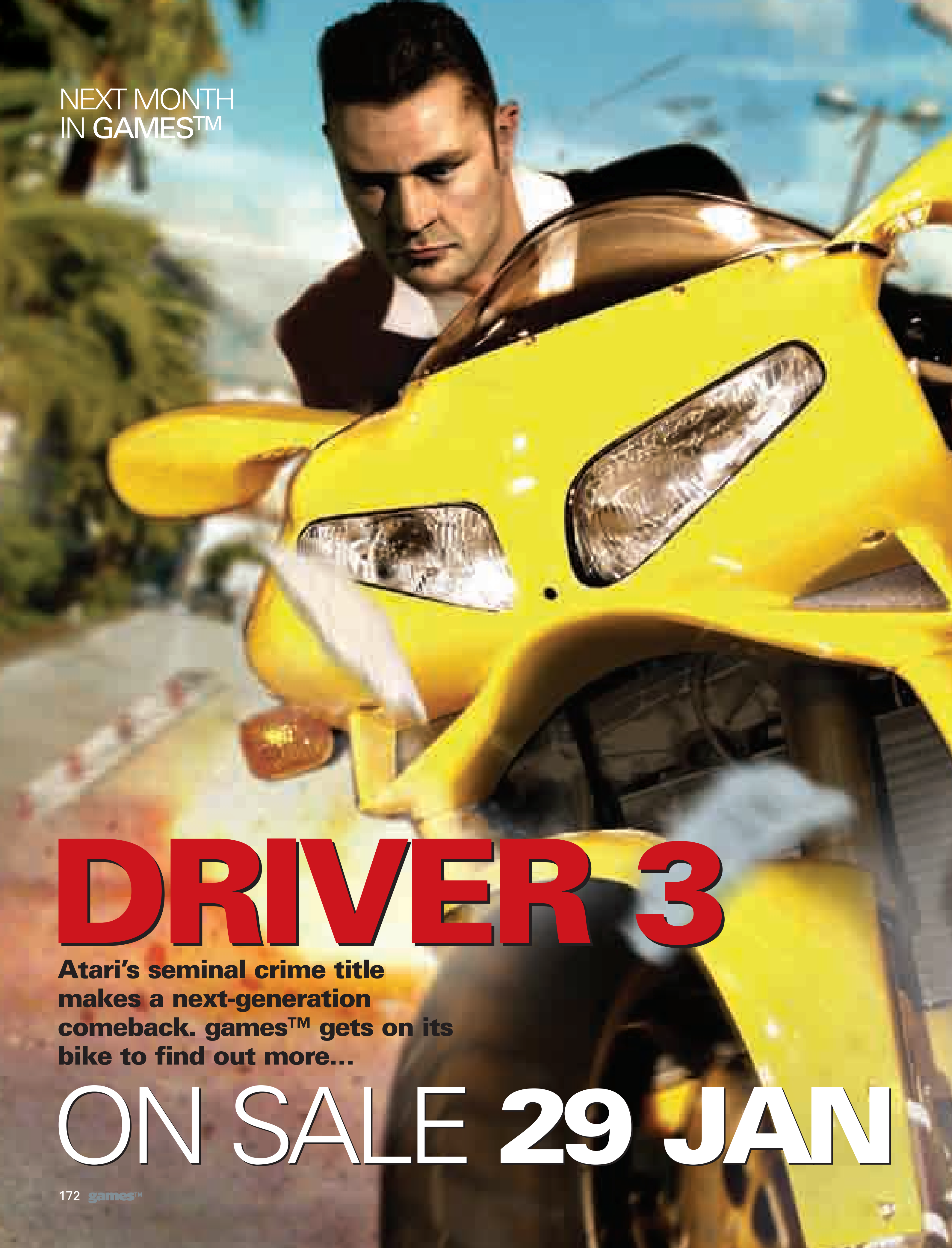
Freeform gaming as it was meant to be; if only all games were this way. We can't wait for the sequel to arrive.



GTA: Vice City

Looks better than its PS2 cousin, and still has just as much 'cool' factor to keep PC gamers playing for ages.




NEXT MONTH
IN GAMES™
DRIVER 3
Atari's seminal crime title
makes a next-generation
comeback. games™ gets on its
bike to find out more...
ON SALE 29 JAN



NEXT MONTH

MORE… PREVIEWS

We line up the battle of the ninjas with *Nightshade, I-Ninja* and *Ninja Gaiden*, take a long look at the latest incarnation of *F-Zero* on the GBA, and more besides

MORE… REVIEWS

Just because it's all gone quiet, it doesn't mean there isn't anything to review. Check back for *Sonic Heroes, Fire Emblem, Rogue Ops* and *Mafia* among others…

MORE… FEATURES

We go behind the scenes with the boys at Reflections, talk to the man responsible for the resurrection of *Street Fighter*, and find out what love's got to do, got to do with the world of videogames

Please note: Due to late code and unforseen circumstances and stuff, we can't guarantee that the next issue will actually contain all these things. But it will definitely have *something* in it.

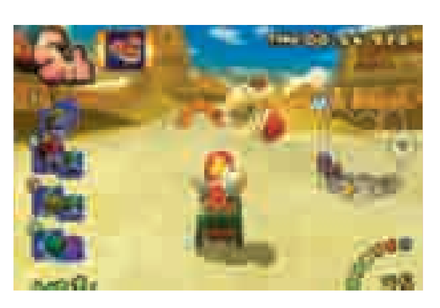
CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

SO, WE OFFER YOU £100 TO SPEND AT GAMESTATION AND WHAT DO WE GET? WELL, LETTERS, THAT'S WHAT. BUT NOW THERE'S A PRIZE THE BAR HAS BEEN RAISED…



The festive flood of new games, the continuing debate about online gaming, and the real reason why piracy has always been (and forever will be) a part of videogaming life. That's what we're talking about…





MAKING CONTACT

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™
Highbury - Paragon
Paragon House
St Peter's Road
Bournemouth
BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum? Here you should be shielded from multiple spams and infantile remarks. Access to the site has been password protected and only those of you who read **games™** will be able to get onto the site – and if you have bought this magazine then you're not the sort to be abusive and childish, are you? Follow these quick steps to getting on the **games™** forum and enjoy hassle-free chatting with those of us who share a passion for gaming.

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the Net browser window: **www.totalgames.net**
You will arrive at the Totalgames website. From here click on the 'forum' icon. News users will have to register via the 'new user' icon – it's a simple step-by-step process which we're sure you can manage.

Step Three:
Once registered, simply email **gamestm@paragon.co.uk** with the password '**megahertz**' and your username. Then a whole world of sophisticated wit and games chat will be yours. It says here.

NINTENDO AND CAPCOM, among others, have been criticised recently for the brevity of their games. Surely, though, allowing developers to increase the quality and/or quantity of their products can be no bad thing. This in turn should mean smaller monetary outlays and/or safer returns per title on the part of the publishers. Ultimately, this could this could lead to shorter games being cheaper, or maybe even a more stable environment for games development.

I realise that many people prefer longer games, but surely a consistently good eight-hour game is better value than a 16-hour game with 12 hours of repetitive combat between the four hours of good bits? Just compare *Ico* with *Jak & Daxter* to see my point.

There is one problem though. As long as certain retailers maintain a ten-day no-quibble return policy gamers can (and do) buy, complete and swap new games. So we can legally enjoy many short games while paying for only a few. We can't expect the industry to keep making these games if they only receive payment for every third game we play.
Brian Ashford

games™: We agree with you to some extent, but this would never work. There are plenty of people who can whiz through 'longer' games – what about the self-titled Radix37, who managed to play through *Metroid Prime* in around two hours? Who would police the average length of a game? And what of the costs of producing games?

Gone are the days when a small team could produce a single game (which enabled publishers to keep costs down); today, even shorter games require sizeable development teams, which is never going to be cheap. Then there's the cost to promote the game, press the disc, distribute it and then try to make a profit… Whether we like it or not, making games is a risky and expensive business.

So if games can't become cheaper surely it's better if developers ensure that games offer a decent lifespan and repeated play? While we all like a quick blast, most of us want and expect £40 worth of gameplay.

SO, THE CHRISTMAS 'games rush' – the time of year when a large number of mixed-quality games are released. I can think of seven decent games I'd like play during this period, but I couldn't do justice to each to get value for money. Now, I fully understand that publishers want to maximise the profit from the game they've invested in, but I think this is getting a little out of hand.

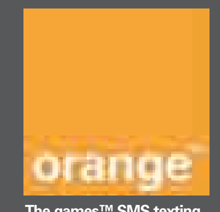
Gamers used to have to rely on paltry pocket money and could only afford a few games a year (unless, of course, you traded in half your collection). Now there's the minimum wage and kids seem to have more pocket money. However, it's a simple fact that most of us cannot afford to buy all the games released

"GAMES ARE PIRATED BECAUSE A PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION ALWAYS HAVE BEEN AND PROBABLY ALWAYS WILL BE THIEVING PIKIES"

SMS TEXT

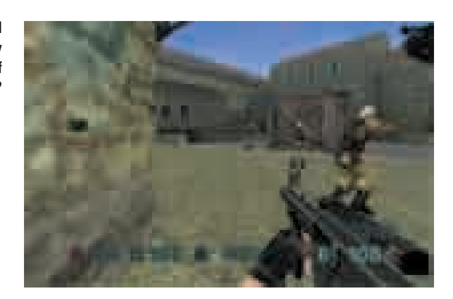
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Counter-Strike is tailored specifically for online play – is this the beginning of the end for offline gaming?



in the run-up to Christmas, so why not spread the releases across the whole year?

If releases were spaced over the year there's nothing to stop you from asking for it at Christmas as there wouldn't be a slew of other games fighting for your attention. Big games get plenty of publicity through magazines (which, admittedly, not everyone reads) in the run-up to their release, but there'd be nothing to stop publishers advertising older titles before Christmas, is there?

Bob Bailey

games™: It all makes sense on paper, but, in practice, it all goes wrong. The simple fact is that people spend staggering amounts on games at Christmas and tend not to bother throughout the rest of the year (unless a Triple-A title is released). Publishers have responded to this by releasing many of their key games at the end of the year, so in a sense we only have ourselves to blame.

Equally, as you imply that you don't mind waiting for games, why don't you just buy whatever you can afford and pick up the others as and when you can? No-one's forcing anyone to buy games on the day they're released, are they? That way everyone is happy. But you're not the only gamer worked up about Christmas release dates…

WHILE I'M CERTAINLY no marketing analyst, there are far too many games released over the Christmas period. I see why big names like *Mario Kart* and *GTA* are there, but wouldn't it be better for a publisher to release a poorer game during a slower time in the year when Triple-A titles are scarce? A game which could be perceived as being rubbish compared to some of the better titles released at Christmas might be received more favourably in summer or spring.

It brings me back to reading a copy of *NGC*; it was the Christmas '99 issue and there were a huge amount of games being reviewed and released – a lot of them were good, but not worth spending 50 quid on when *Jet Force Gemini*, *Super Smash Bros.*, *Wrestlemania 2000* and *Donkey Kong 64* were out. *Rainbow Six* was out too, but few were probably interested when they had the previous four titles to choose from.

This year it's even worse, with all consoles having Triple-A titles and we all know which ones are going to perform the best. If anyone looks at a release list, you'll see games which could be interesting and have okay reviews from mags, but just aren't going to get any bling. But maybe I'm being selfish…

Andre Morello

games™: We were beginning to lose you at the end there… Question: do you think that developers look at their games and think 'No, this one's a bit of a duffer, we ought to release this at a time when no bugger's going to buy it?'. If you do, please stop buying **games™**.

I SIT HERE writing this, surrounded by carrier bags from my latest shopping trip, emblazoned with names not found on UK high streets. Why? Because I've just got back from holiday in America, having spent more on games in the past week and a half than in the previous six months. It's not even that I've just bought a couple of expensive games – at

CONTACT

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TEXT LIFE...

☐ Do i have to buy a pc to get broadband just so I can play xbox live, seems exspensive to me.
games™: No, try this link to find out more: www.xbox.com/en-gb/support/live/

☐ It seems im the only person to find splinter cell fairly easy on hard. Not bad for a 4yr old dont ya think
games™: We're assuming that's your mental age, no?

☐ how come xgra is no longer in your essentials list?
games™: Because for each of the formats it appeared on there are 20 games that we feel are more, er, essential.

☐ In issue 13 there is a double page ad 4 GTA double pack on X-box released 02 Jan 04. The review says TBC. Please confirm. Also will it get released on the GC?
games™: In a 'brought to you by the letters R, O, C, K, S, T, A and R and the word Sony' way, we weren't allowed to confirm the pack's release date. We knew what it was, but Rockstar wasn't allowed to confirm it for contractual reasons. As for it appearing on the GameCube – you are joking, right?

☐ What do u think of the PSP prototype? I'll cast the first stone and say it's a thing of beauty.
games™: It looks like it, certainly. Whether Sony makes good on its promises is quite another matter.

☐ Just texting to say that your mag is great-if a lil pricey. Also, I want to say that after buying only ninty consoles all my life, Im gonna buy an xbox too.
games™: Thanks very much. Why not subscribe, you can find the details on page 170 – that way it won't be so pricey.

☐ Im a 22 year old avid gamer. Cant get all the screens but am willing to perform "services" for the famicom sp, what do you say? BTW, 34G, 10 consoles… ;-)
games™: Oh. My. God.

☐ Bo bo ski, wat un dot un?!
games™: Sorry, we don't understand, which can only be a good thing.

☐ Regarding your responce to Ben Thomas rant [issue 12] that was very politicaly correct of you, i hope that fence is comfy wudnt want u getting a splinter in your arse.
games™: How kind of you.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

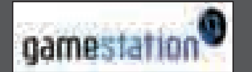
☐ **IN RESPONSE TO** Jim Foley's burblings on the subject of piracy in issue 12, can I throw in my own tuppence worth? Completely contrary to what the shiny Mr Foley was saying, the price of games has bugger all to do with it. A couple of examples:

1) Set the 'way-back' machine to, ooh, 1985. See that company in the corner? Yes, behind the Commodore 64 – that's Mastertronic, that is. It's suffering horribly because all its Spectrum games are being pirated. These games sell new for £1.99. Okay, shove the C64 aside for a minute – look at that hairy programmer skulking over there. Know what he's doing? He's writing an incredibly unreliable speedloader which is mastered at such a low volume that a copy is unlikely to work (as, indeed, is the original). Why's that? Cos he's sick of his games, which retail for £5.49, being pirated.

2) Let's skip forward to 1999. I've written a whole pile of freebie videogames (I was one of the founder members of RetroSpec). As an experiment, I thought I'd make one of my games shareware. I made the game a time-limited demo and put a readme file in the distribution saying 'go to this website and it'll give you a registration key for free'. Within a few weeks, 30 or so people a day were visiting the site. Then the game appeared on warez sites and traffic to the site just stopped. But, but, but, you say. Yes, I know, people were pirating a FREE game.

Which brings me, somewhat circuitously, to my point. Games aren't pirated cos they're expensive. Games are pirated because a percentage of the population always have been and probably always will be thieving pikies. The prosecution rests, m'lud.
John M Dow

games™: We'd love to strike up a spirited debate with you, we'd like to find a fault with your argument, we want to take you to task about 'pikies' – but we can't. You make good point, you make funny, you make us laugh – that doesn't happen enough, so you win.



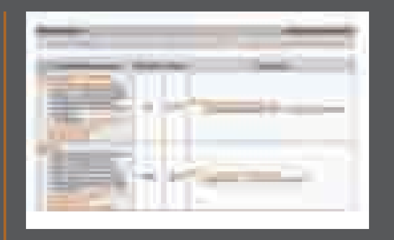
If you'd like to line your pockets with £100 of Gamestation vouchers then send us a games-related letter crammed with sparkling wit and pertinent points. Extra marks will be awarded for neat handwriting…

▷ $49.99 for *FF X-2* that's only £29 by the current exchange rate, a good £10 less than it'll be on release here and at least three months earlier. Of course, UK release dates are old hat – we know we'll have to wait ages, because although we're an English-speaking country we're still part of Europe and must await the translations, both PAL and foreign language.

What really gets me is the wealth of choice that the Americans have. I picked up *Chrono Cross* and *Sword Of Mana* for the PSone (neither received a UK release) and *Disgaea*, *Hack* and *Magic Pengel* for the PS2 (none of which currently grace our release lists). Maybe if there's enough outcry then they'll secure a release date – if *Gregory Horror Show* can make it, then I'm sure anything can. Sadly, to many, half the fun of importing is owning something which most other gamers will never have access to, and the shelves can only hold so many titles.

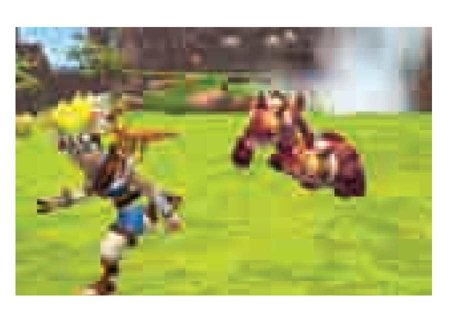
Of course, then there's the problem of playing these games. Easiest is to have your machine chipped, but to me that takes half the fun away. I enjoy buying games, but if I can easily download or copy them then I know I'll probably do so – I'd tell myself I'll still buy the good ones, but would I really? However, it actually (luckily) worked out less to buy a second-hand NTSC PS2 – it opens up a whole

"WOULDN'T IT BE BETTER FOR PUBLISHERS TO RELEASE BAD GAMES DURING A SLOWER TIME IN THE YEAR WHEN TRIPLE-A TITLES ARE SCARCE?"



FROM THE FORUM

SO IS ONLINE GAMING REALLY THE NEXT BIG THING?



new world of games from two great systems, yet doesn't risk ruining the joy of unwrapping something new.
Dan Parkington

games™: We're thrilled that you went on holiday, and equally delighted that you saved money on some great games, but we're afraid we can't really help you. America, simply by being bigger than the UK, is bound to have titles that we're never going to see over here. If a company can make the money back on its game by selling enough copies in the States, why would it want to spend more cash converting it to PAL if the returns won't be as high?

A LOT OF energy is being spent telling gamers that online console gaming is the way forward. But have these marketing folks really thought this through? It's only natural that given something different to talk about then they are going to get excited about it, but perhaps they need to see this as the double-edged sword that it could become.

You see, there are an awful lot of obstacles getting in the way of mass adoption of broadband online gaming. For starters, the availability of broadband is not as widespread as we are led to believe; many of those who can get it simply cannot afford it; and do the fabled 'casual gamers' really want to shell out an ongoing subscription for their casual habit? I suspect not.

No problem, you might think, there are still plenty of people lucky enough to have broadband, keen enough gamers to pay to play online, and with enough disposable income that any additional subscriptions are acceptable. They make the medium worth investing in.

But what about the people who don't have the opportunity to play games online? Are the single-player features going to be enough to make them part with their cash? By way of answering my question I will present you with this example: *PGR2* is all over the television at the moment with the online features being heavily pushed. Usually this is the sort of game that I love and would buy without a second thought, but my lack of broadband access means that the online features are useless, and I will therefore be paying for a product that I cannot fully use, makes it a difficult purchase to justify. As a result my money will go elsewhere.

If I, as a gamer of over 20 years with plenty of disposable income, have made this decision, how many people with more 'casual' habits will reach the same conclusion due to this network-centric ad campaign? Will online capabilities therefore end up costing the developers in the long run due to reduced sales and increased development investment?
Dan Coleman

games™: Admittedly, developers could produce games that are tailored to broadband gaming, but the example you've given is probably more indicative of the kind of games we'll see in the future. *PGR2* is an excellent single-player game *and* it's a great online experience. As you rightly point out, many people don't have broadband, won't want to play online, or simply can't afford to – and as long as this remains the case there will always be great offline gaming experiences.

Brian Bloodaxe
I have never been a fan of online gaming. In my experience it provides little more than competitive deathmatch challenges and plot-lite role-play. And yet online gaming is getting bigger every month. Some people would have you believe that this is the future and this more sociable, less artificial gaming form will replace 'lonely solo play'. Personally, I prefer the better structure and deeper plot of conventional solo play and I don't think that I am alone in this. So in five or ten years could online gaming account for the majority of the industry?

Inebriated
From my experience, which is limited to very rare PC gaming and two weeks of Xbox Live, I have found that online gaming can be used in any way you like. Like you, I do not like one-on-one match-ups against people I don't know – i.e. *Top Spin, MechAssault* and so on. If I play like this I want it to be against my friends, people I know and feel comfortable in that situation with. But with Xbox Live I love the ranking tables for *PGR2* and *Burnout 2.* This side of online gaming I wasn't really aware of and it has proved to be my favourite bit. Particularly *PGR2* – this is a game that shows how to produce a Live title. If you want to go one-on-one you can. If you want to race in a large field, you can. If you want to pit yourself against a ranking table, you can. If you want to contact your friends and only race them, you can. You retain the choice of how you play the game. I think online gaming will be a part of every game in five to ten years, but will not replace solo play, and I welcome this. The downside is that the industry will use this as a tool to sneak more charges onto us. Downloadable content and pay-as-you-go log-ons are coming soon and are here to stay.

Ianos
Majority of the industry? No chance. It will account for a much larger market share than it has in the past, but will never replace solo play and will definitely never become more popular than coming home from a hard day out, putting *PES3* on with three of your good friends and battling it out til 4am. Personally I could never get my head around online play – I tried *Half-Life*, failed. Tried *Team Fortress Classic*, had a bit more success but ultimately failed. Tried *Counter-Strike*, amazing fun – even if I did nothing but lose. I was decent at *C&C Tiberian Sun* though… The main thing that will hold back online gaming is pricing – I can never see myself signing up to Live or PS2 online, as I simply can't afford it. Playing at home with buds is free though.

Hong Kong Phooey
Keeping it brief – no. Yes, it will become more and more popular with the increase in broadband coverage, however, I still see online gaming as a pursuit for the 'keener' gamer.

mmicheal0
Online gaming is only as good as how well you get on with the gamers you're playing.

ApocalypseDude
"But with Xbox Live I love the ranking tables for *PGR2* and *Burnout 2.* This side of online gaming I wasn't really aware of and it has proved to be my favourite bit" This is the side of online gameplay I'm most interested in. I like online 'league tables' and high scores that I can try to beat, like the *Ikaruga* one (that I'm never, ever going to get anywhere near). I'm not really fussed about online gameplay at the moment, though. It's an old argument, but nothing really beats getting a load of people round to your house and sticking *Bishi Bashi Special* or *Mario Kart* on. Maybe in five to ten years time online gameplay will have progressed so much that it's really worth doing, but right now I'll stick with *Mario Kart.*


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